Reader Engagement in Transmedia Adaptations:

Genre, Narration, and Characterization in *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us*

Oubret, Pavla
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HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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This thesis examines how readers interact with stories across transmedia adaptations. By comparing three different works, an original comic *Legends in Exile*, a video game inspired by the comic called *The Wolf Among Us*, and the game's adaptation back into a comic of the same name, I provide an insight into how medium affects the way a story is told. In contrasting the two comics and the video game, I demonstrate the impact of the inclusion of direct interaction with the narrative.

The two comics are both detective fiction; *Legends in Exile* is a clue-puzzle and *The Wolf Among Us* a hard-boiled detective story. I use the concept of schemas in showing how the different generic properties come across in the different works, and how the medium affordances aid or impede the realization of the genre. Kai Mikkonen's approach to narration in comics, which favors focusing on the relationship between what is shown and how it is shown, and who perceives and where the center of focalization is, reveals that the narration in *The Wolf Among Us* comic discourages engagement with readers, direct opposite of *Legends in Exile*. Using Marco Caracciolo's character-centered illusion I show the different ways the comics succeed or fail in modelling Bigby as a character that readers can engage with. By adapting Caracciolo's interpretative reading strategies, I propose a way of analyzing the connection between players and characters in video games.

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1. Introduction

Properties of the medium shape how stories are told. Interactive narratives, such as digital fictions or video games, offer direct participation in the narrative act. The engagement with linear narratives is different, as the meaning making is restricted to the internal dialogue between readers and the text. In Espen Aarseth's words, in literature, or linear narratives, "The performance of their reader takes place all in his head, while the user of cybertext also performs in an extranoematic sense" (1). This thesis is an exploration into the different ways the medium of comics and the medium of video games include their audiences in their narratives. I examine the impact the presence of an interactive element has on the narrative and the engagement with the audience. I show how narratives employ their unique genre and medium affordances in audience interaction, and I also demonstrate how narration and characterization can be negatively impacted in terms of reader or player immersion due to the very nature of a nonlinear narrative.

My focus here lies in the type of video game whose goal is first and foremost to tell a story. The video game *The Wolf Among Us* is an episodic adventure game developed by Telltale Games. This game is based on the graphic novel *Fables*, created by Bill Willingham and published by DC Comics' imprint Vertigo. *The Wolf Among Us* has also received its own adaptation in the form of a graphic novel bearing the same name, created by Dave Justus and Lilah Sturges and published digitally also by Vertigo. All three works are situated in modern day New York and tell the story of an underground community of various fairy tale and mythological characters, who have been forced to leave their worlds (known as Homelands), when fleeing an unknown enemy called The Adversary. These characters, referring to themselves as Fables, have taken refuge in the so-called "Mundane World", that is, "our" world many centuries ago. They do not age and are possibly immortal. The human-looking ones live, for the most part, in a community called "Fabletown" in the middle of Manhattan amongst ordinary humans, who the Fables call "Mundies". Fables of the more magical or animal nature live in a place called the Farm, located in upstate New York. In order to live together as a community, Fables have granted amnesty for every crime committed in the Homelands. Non-human looking Fables which do not wish to live on the Farm rely on a magic called glamour,[1] which disguises them as human.

[1] I use British spelling of this word in accordance with the primary material.

Legends in Exile, published in 2002, is the first collected issue of *Fables*. Although it is an introduction to the series, it functions as a standalone story. In it, Fabletown's sheriff Bigby Wolf with the help of Snow White, Fabletown's Deputy Mayor, investigates the disappearance and possible murder of Snow White's sister, Rose Red. This detective story also serves as an introduction to the storyworld of *Fables* and its many characters, such as minor characters Beauty and Beast; [2] Bluebeard, Rose Red's secret fiancé and number one suspect, and Jack of The Tales, Rose Red's actual boyfriend who, as we learn, together with Rose Red faked her murder to frame Bluebeard and run away with his money. The video game *The Wolf Among Us* was released episodically between 2013 and 2014 by Telltale Games, and its comic adaptation of the same name was published digitally in 2015, and later received a print version as well. *The Wolf Among Us*, both video game and the digital comic (henceforth I use '(vg)' and '(dc)' after the title to distinguish between the two), are set approximately twenty years before the events of *Legends in Exile*. These too follow Bigby Wolf's detective work, this time as he and Snow White, at this point an assistant to the Deputy Mayor, try to solve a string of gruesome murders among the Fables community. In the end, they uncover a criminal underworld of black-market glamour and an exploitative prostitution ring, all led by Crooked Man (a character from the "There Was a Crooked Man" nursery rhyme). Beauty and Beast are once again minor characters, and Bluebeard is amongst the suspects. The game of course allows players to make choices which alter the storyline to that of the comic. However, as will become apparent, these choices do not have a major impact, and the comic is a very faithful adaptation of the game.

These works therefore share similar visual styles, settings, and many characters. Furthermore, they are detective stories: a genre which demands the participation of readers even in its linear form. They are not similar in scope, and for this reason I only include selected parts of *The Wolf Among Us* (both video game and digital comic). The video game consists of five episodes, the first one of which, called "Faith", is just under two hours long. This episode contains all of the game's unique features, such as branching plot lines, dialogue choices, and all the game mechanics, for example, combat and interacting with objects. The episode corresponds to the first four chapters of its adaptation, which span across 129 pages. While these selections do not cover the entire plot, they are nonetheless a representative sample of both works. The printed edition of *Legends in Exile*, which I refer to in this thesis, is 125 pages long. The length of the sections analyzed is therefore similar. It is important to note that

[2] His name is indeed Beast, hence the lack of determiner.

throughout this thesis, "*The Wolf Among Us* (dc or vg)" refers only to the selected sections, unless stated otherwise.

In my analyses I adopt a stylistic approach. I consider "how multimodal texts are composed and how the various modes interact to produce meaning and influence interpretation" (Gibbons and Whiteley, 250). The semiotic modes – modes used for meaning making – considered here include, for example, layout, captions, use of colors, and the representation of speech. In this thesis I follow the concepts outlined in Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala's *Multimodality: Foundations, Research and Analysis: A Problem-Oriented Introduction*. The video game concepts analyzed here, such as space, context, gameplay, and so on, are based on Fernández-Vara's *Introduction to Game Analysis*. While I analyze the printed edition of *Legends in Exile* in consideration of the materiality of the medium, for ease of use, I used the Kindle edition (published in 2013) in the figures given here. The webcomic *The Wolf Among Us* is analyzed in its digital version. Finally, when working with the game, I have used NVIDIA GeForce Experience software to record my playthroughs, and the figures shown in the thesis consist of screen captures from the playthrough recordings.

In what follows, I analyze the role which genre, narration, and characterization play in engaging readers in the story. By reader engagement, I refer to the way readers interact with the texts intellectually, emotionally, and experientially, as well as how they immerse, or involve, themselves in the story. When talking about comics, it is important to distinguish the medium from the narrative. As McCloud illustrates in his *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, "the artform – the *medium* – known as comics is a *vessel* which can hold any *number* of ideas and *images*" (6; emphasis original). Therefore, throughout this thesis, I use the term 'comics' to refer to the medium of comics and its materiality; 'superhero comic', then refers to the specific genre. Graphic novels then are a "long-term incarnation" (Hatfield, xi) of comics, that is, the medium. *Fables* is therefore a graphic novel, and, as I demonstrate in this thesis, also a superhero comic, among other genres.

In consideration of the fluid nature of genre, I approach this topic from a readerly perspective. To this end, I use the concept of *schema*, or "a cognitive structure which supplies information about your generic understanding of a particular phenomenon" (Gibbons and Whiteley, 175). As readers advance through the text, they apply their various knowledge schemas to understand the text (222). Genre, then, is "a cognitive construct which is triggered by textual features but identified by readers based on their schematic knowledge" (254). The concept of schemas is especially pertinent when discussing how the texts trigger or sustain

various generic features. Schema is useful in discussing narration and characterization as well. I analyze narration as a combination of what and how something is told, shown, and perceived, an approach taken by Kai Mikkonen in *The Narratology of Comic Art*. Finally, I analyze the main character of these works, Bigby Wolf, in terms of Marco Caracciolo's *character-centered illusion*, which is "a specific kind of feeling, whereby readers have the sense of gaining access to a character's mental processes as though he or she were a minded being" (37). This concept effectively highlights how immersion in the texts, and especially the video game, is achieved, sustained, and broken, through the main character.

Due to the constraints of this thesis, I refrain from diving deep into cognitive studies and reader reception, but rather discuss the way the comics use their medium affordances in providing information to readers, and how the differences between the works demonstrate the impact of a direct involvement on the story from the video game, which goes beyond a simple branching of the plot. As I demonstrate, the interactive aspect has a relatively minor influence on the narrative structure, yet, ironically, it negatively effects the possible participation of the audience, and limits the depth of the character players control. As it is not possible to conduct an in-depth analysis of the video game, I focus on the genre properties in terms of literary narrative, rather than gameplay genres (e.g., action or role-play). Similarly, I need to omit the auditory properties of the video game, especially music. However, the digital comic is an exceptionally faithful adaptation of the game, and in fact, the contrasting analysis of the works of the same medium further highlights the differences found.

2. Genre

Legends in Exile and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc and vg) are detective stories about fairy tale, folklore, and other fictional characters and their lives in modern day New York City. Genre is therefore a core aspect of these works. Jack Zipes notes on the subject that "Though distinct, genres of stories depend on one another, for there is no such thing as a pure genre, and all tale types have a symbiotic relationship to one another" (4). This is especially true for the *Fables* series, where so many different genres blend together: fairy tale, detective fiction, and to some extent superhero comics, are the generic building blocks of both *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc and vg). The superhero aspect is more relevant in discussing Bigby Wolf as a character, and although I analyze some of the generic features throughout this chapter, I devote more space to this topic in Chapter Four, Characterization.

The term "fairy tale" is used by Jack Zipes to denote both oral folk tales as well as the literary wonder tales (3). I do the same throughout this thesis. It is fitting especially when we consider Fables. The long history of fairy tales resulted in countless different versions of the same tale, and Willingham's characters are unique amalgamations, impossible to match to a specific tale. For example, Snow White's backstory includes both the story of "Snow-White and Rose-Red", in which Snow White and her sister break a curse on a prince who had been changed into a bear, as well as "Snow White", the story with an evil queen and seven dwarves. Additionally, Willingham's characters are not confined to "traditional" fairy tales. For instance, King Cole of the "Old King Cole" nursery rhyme is the mayor of Fabletown, and Fabletown's librarian named Buffkin is one of L. Frank Baum's winged monkeys.

The history of detective fiction can be traced to Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. William Nelles claims that "All English-language mystery fiction derives, directly and indirectly, from [these]", and that Poe's works "set essential characteristics by which a new literary genre was defined" (1947). For instance, "The Purloined Letter" added "the convention of hiding key objects in plain sight" (1948). This element is present in *Legends in Exile*. While certainly not an object, Rose Red is alive amongst the community mourning her murder, even attending a lavish party. Following Poe, this "tradition of the mystery as a puzzle to be solved" was continued by, among others, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and later, Agatha Christie (1948) during The Golden Age of Detective Fiction between the World Wars. At that point, cozy mysteries and clue-puzzles were the dominant genres in Great Britain, whereas in the United States "A new kind of American detective story arose in reaction to the 'English' model during the 1920's […] known as the 'hard-boiled' school" (1949). This gritty, aggressive type of mystery,[3] as well as the English clue-puzzle, are prominent genres in both *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc and vg). In the following sections, I show how various generic schemas are evoked multimodally using different modes of expression, including layout, typography, colors, and captions.

[3] The analyses which follow might be suggestive of the noir genre, rather than hard-boiled fiction. There is, however, much debate on the relationship between the two. Scott D. Yarbrough points out that hard-boiled and noir are often used interchangeably (2156), whereas Otto Penzler argues that these two are "diametrically opposed" (x). See Penzler, Otto. "Foreword." *The Best American Noir of the Century,* by Ellroy, James. Random House, 2011, pp. ix-xi. For this reason, and the innate connection of noir to cinematography, I only focus on hard-boiled fiction in this thesis.

2.1 Genre in *Legends in Exile*

Printed in a size typical of mainstream superhero comics, the materiality of *Legends in Exile* (henceforth referred to as "*LE*" within citations) in itself is already evocative of the superhero genre. The cover of the first printed edition (shown in Figure 1), which I use in this analysis, follows similar conventions as superhero comics: the title of the series, written in large letters, is placed at the top of the page, with an advertising blurb above; a list of authors in the bottom corner; and, finally, the main characters. The name, "FABLES: Legends in Exile" (*LE*, 0), and the setting – a stone building with a round balcony, resembling medieval architecture – are reminiscent of fairy tale or fantasy. In the background, however, are modern skyscrapers, and in the lower right corner, a street sign. This contrast is more apparent in the characters, with animals both normal and fantastical (a pig and a flying monkey) mixed with humans. In addition to the obvious allusion to Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, and a lesser known trumpetist from the "Little Boy Blue" nursery rhyme, the apple placed in front of the woman subtly hints at her being Snow White. Next to the apple is a plaque with the word "DIRECTOR" (0). At this point, "Fables" could just be a name of some superhero initiative with Snow White in charge, especially considering that many comic superheroes (or villains) are based on various mythological characters (e.g., DC's Shining Knight or Marvel's Thor). Thus, judging the book by its cover, readers might approach *Legends in Exile* as a superhero comic with possible mythological aspects.

Figure 1: Cover of *Legends in Exile*. © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The opening scene of the comic, shown in Figure 2, is set in contemporary New York, It is a bright day, and a man in a taxi arrives in a rush at an upscale building, and races through the expensive-looking lobby and staircase to a small room, with the door labeled "Security Office, B. Wolf" (*LE*, 13). At this point, three different genres are present. The large metropolitan city is a typical setting for most superhero comics. At the same time, the opening words signal a fairy tale schema: the temporal caption situates the story with the fairy tale collocation of "Once upon a time" (*LE*, 11). The caption is visually evocative of fairy tale as well, styled as a parchment and written with a drop cap "O". In a stark contrast, the spatial caption "In a fictional land called New York City" is written in a typical comic font set in a basic rectangular box. The text itself is ironically twisting what is and what is not a fairy tale.

The last caption of the page contains the name of the chapter and the authors. It is visually and textually reminiscent of fairy tale as well: "Chapter One, Old Tales Revisited, In which we meet many of our principal players and get just the first hint or two of some of the myriad troubles to come" (11). Each of the five chapters' credit captions is stylistically similar, and in effect each time reintroduces the fairy tale schema, even if the lexicon does not.

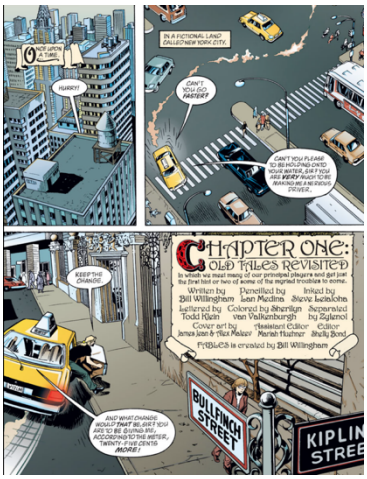

Figure 2: Opening scene (*LE*, 11). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The Security Office of Bigby Wolf, as seen in Figure 3, is what triggers the third generic schema of *Legends in Exile*, detective fiction. As Jack enters, Bigby is sitting behind a desk, with a lit cigarette in his mouth. On his desk is an overflowing ashtray, rotary phone, lamp, and a stack of what appear to be mugshots. Behind him is a bulletin board covered in notes and a filing cabinet, and to the left is a coffee machine and a trench coat hanging on the rack. In other words, all of these items are almost stereotypical paraphernalia of a detective's office. Even the name on the door – Wolf – can trigger the trope of the lone wolf type of a detective.

Figure 3: Bigby's office (*LE*, 13). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Jack informs Wolf that Rose Red is missing, and Bigby goes to inform her sister Snow White, Fabletown's Deputy Mayor. Snow White is currently dealing with Beauty and Beast. It is this scene that informs readers that these characters are indeed fairy tale characters, rather than stylized superheroes. The couple is angry as they cannot afford glamour strong enough to disguise Beast, and the Fabletown government refuses to help them. They offend Snow White, who shuts them down, reminding them that while her title might be only a deputy, the mayor King Cole only does "all the formal **gladhanding**" (*LE*, 17),[4] and it is actually Snow who is effectively in charge of Fabletown. In addition to firmly establishing the contextual history of the characters as fairy tale figures, this scene also mocks the fairy tale "happily ever after". As Beauty states, "try being married for almost a thousand years without a few ups and downs along the way" (14). It also establishes Snow as assertive, de facto leader of Fabletown.

[4] The texts cited from both *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) throughout this thesis include original typographical emphases.

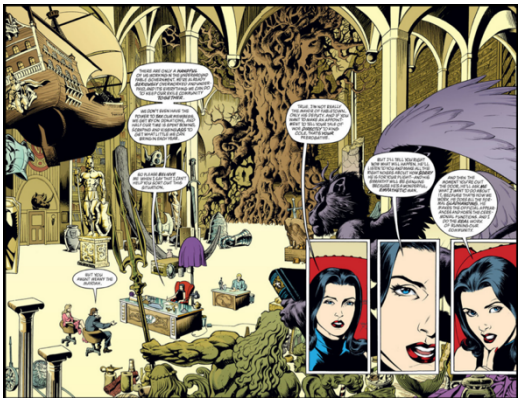

Figure 4: Business Office (*LE*, 16-17). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The scene in the Business Office is a good example of how layout can support meaning making as well as genre. I return to the topic of layout in the third chapter of this thesis. For now, suffice it to say that the layout space afforded by the page can be thought of as a canvas, and in this comic, most of this space consists of a simple 2 or 3 tier grid[5] (i.e., two or three horizontally organized rows) with clearly separated panels – a layout commonly used by superhero comics. There are two exceptions to this layout in *Legends in Exile*, both of which constitute a double page spread. One of these is the depiction of the Business Office during Beaty and Beast's visit, as shown in Figure 4, with a few inset panels focusing on Snow White's face, as she chastises the fairy tale couple. The office is magically connected to another plane, possibly even Homelands themselves. In addition, a closer look at the objects in the office, such as a flying ship, a sword in a stone (presumably The Flying Dutchman and Excalibur), among others, implicitly reveals the magic contained in the Business Office, and triggers the fairy tale schema. The yellow color dominating the page brightens the place and adds to the impression of vastness. The layout, then, communicates to the readers both the symbolic and the literal greatness of the place. The second use of double page spread is similar in its emphasis of significance of the scene, as it depicts the escape of Fables from their homelands (for further analysis of this second scene, see section 3.1).

The representation of sound effects is a rather expected feature of comics. Yet in *Legends in Exile*, sound effects are used only twice, both of which are depicted in the same panel (Figure 5). Both of these sounds are instances of onomatopoeia. The panel depicts a sleeping, snoring pig, named Colin (one of the three little pigs), in the bushes under the Woodland building, Fabletown's administrative center and a luxury apartment building. Inside, a phone rings, and someone answers. The two different sounds pictured have similar properties: they are rhythmically repeated and bear a certain annoying quality to them. These properties are reflected in their visual similarity. While at first

Figure 5: Sound effects, 1 (*LE*, 76). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

[5] The use of numerals here is in accordance with Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala's terminology.

red, the "**ZZZZZ**" slowly fades into the yellow of the "**RINNNG**", and the font is similarly jagged. This one occurrence of a sound effect has a disturbing effect: the panel, dominated by the dark blue of the night, interjected with the red and yellow cacophony of sounds, shows to readers that the night is everything but calm. As revealed few panels later, the call is from Flycatcher and Boy Blue, whom Bigby has enlisted as help in the investigation. They inform Bigby how much blood they have found at Rose Red's apartment, and consequently Bigby tells Snow that it was too much for someone to survive. In other words, the peace disturbed is metaphorical as well. This comic feature is thus used to disrupt the overall fairy tale tone, both visually and generically.

In fairy tales and detective fiction, brief descriptions are a common feature, be it that of beautiful princesses or murder suspects. These are, similarly to sound effects, missing in *Legends in Exile*, thus defying possible generic expectations. One explanation might be that here, the medium influences the narration: as readers clearly see what the characters look like, there is no need to describe them. Yet a suspect, for example, could be shown with their face hidden in shadows or masked. There is another reason for the lack of descriptions: everything presented in *Legends in Exile* is known. The setting, modern day New York, is familiar to most readers, and so are the characters, even though the degree of this knowledge might differ. More importantly, the characters all know each other. The Fables community seems to be rather tightknit, and despite the story taking place in Manhattan, there is a feeling of a much smaller setting.

A clue-puzzle, "the standard form for a mystery novel" (Canfield Reisman, 1902), typically "has a closed-world setting, that is, it takes place in a place where a small number of characters, all of whom know one another, are brought together in a limited area. After a murder occurs, everyone remains in place until the murderer is identified" (1906). While the closed space is metaphorical – it is a community, rather than a room or a train – no one attempts to leave, and Bigby always knows where the suspects are. Clue-puzzle mysteries have fairly distinct features, and almost all of them are present in *Legends in Exile*. Canfield Reisman notes that "Agatha Christie […] often uses detectives' side-kicks to mislead readers by having them misinterpret clues and jump to erroneous conclusions" (1902). Flycatcher and Boy Blue informing Bigby about the blood found, and consequently Bigby informing Snow, is one such example of erroneous conclusion, as it is later revealed that Rose is alive.

There are other elements which trigger this clue-puzzle schema earlier on. In fact, it is already at the very beginning. In clue-puzzles, murders are supposed to be gotten "out of the

way as soon as possible", so that readers do not empathize with the victims (Canfield Reisman, 1904) – the genre's primary appeal is "intellectual, not emotional" (1901), after all. Another essential ingredient in a clue-puzzle is a red herring. Bluebeard, who back in the Homelands (or in Charles Perrault's 1697 story) beheaded all of his wives, is the perfect candidate. But as it turns out, Bluebeard is a target of a fraud, which is yet another clue-puzzle element. At the conclusion of the investigation, clue-puzzles often have the detective make a speech in front of the assembled suspects, at the end of which he reveals the culprit. *Legends in Exile* follows this formula to the letter, literally. As Bigby himself says, "This is it. In the mystery novels this is called the 'parlor scene', where the clever **detective** reveals all" (*LE*, 100). The end of the preceding chapter even teases it with the caption "Next: **Whodunit**" (78). This caption is shown in Figure 6. The words themselves trigger a clue-puzzle (or detective fiction in general) schema, yet the yellow, parchment-like frame and the font of the word "next" are more fit for a fairy tale. This small caption illustrates the almost ironical juxtaposition of genres in *Legends in Exile*.

Figure 6: "Whodunit" caption (*LE*, 78). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

At the end of the story, Bigby and Snow White are standing on a rooftop. Warm, orange color washes over the pages, painting a romantic picture of two lovers during sunset. Earlier, Bigby has convinces Snow that it is pertinent to the investigation that she attends a Remembrance Day feast, an annual celebration, as his date. Bigby now admits that he lied, and simply wanted to dance with her. In a true clue-puzzle fashion, where romance is seen as a distraction from the plot (Canfield Reisman, 1904), Snow rejects his advances, asserting that they are only colleagues. It seems that *Legends in Exile* is through and through a clue-puzzle. Yet there is one integral element missing: no murder has taken place. With Bigby revealing Rose Red and Jack's plot before they have the opportunity to run away with Bluebeard's money, the whole affair ends up being a victimless crime, an ending more reminiscent of a fairy tale. This is in stark contrast to *The Wolf Among Us* adaptations, where heads literally roll left and right, as I discuss in the following section.

2.2 Genre in *The Wolf Among Us* (Digital Comic)

With the digital comic *The Wolf Among Us* (henceforth referred to as "*TWAU* (dc)" in citations) it is only the cover, rather than materiality, which first suggests specific generic schemas. The cover, shown in Figure 7, is dominated by Bigby Wolf. He is placed against a dark background of buildings at night with lights on, wearing a white shirt and a brown tie.

The most striking feature, however, is his face. He is portrayed in an aggressive pose, with his dark furrowed brow contrasting unnaturally light green eyes, and his mouth is open as if mid-bite, revealing white teeth with large, sharp canines. He resembles more a vampire than a wolf (or a werewolf, for that matter). Even for readers familiar with *Fables* or the video game, the cover is very evocative of the horror genre. The upper section of the cover provides the publisher, credits, title, and a reference to the video game, all in a combination of neon green, white, and black letters in various fonts (with the exception of the word "FABLES", which is styled in the same bubble-theme as in *Legends in Exile*). The title itself – *The Wolf Among Us* – is suggestive of some unknown danger lurking within. While readers or players familiar with the character of Bigby Wolf might know that the title is a play on words (although, in fact, there is danger within the Fable community, but it is not Bigby), the combination of the intimidating, vampire-looking character, dark background and bleak letters further enforces the somberness of a horror schema.

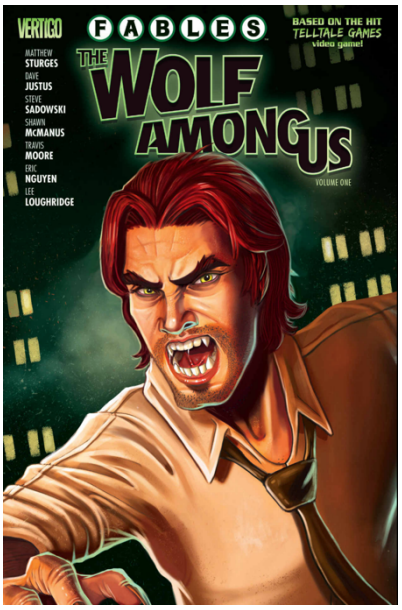

Figure 7: Cover of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

This dark atmosphere is present throughout the comic. The opening scene is set at night, when Bigby arrives at the apartment building in Cambria heights. The first panel, which takes the upper half of the page, is shown in Figure 8. As in the cover, Bigby Wolf is the prominent feature. He is portrayed from his profile, as he lights a cigarette. Positioned on the right edge of the panel, he is framing the scene. Almost as if looking over Bigby's shoulder, we see the dark, unkempt building, with a solitary streetlight casting light on a parked car in front it. This scenery is evocative of something sinister. Unlike in *Legends in Exile*, there is no chapter heading but a context summary: "Seeking refuge from the war that ravaged their magical homelands, a group of survivors escaped to the mundane world, many of whom have taken up residence in New York City. Though the deeds

Figure 8: Opening panel (*TWAU* (dc), 7). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

of their past lives are known to us through fairy tale, nursery rhyme, and myth, they live in secret among us, calling themselves Fables" (*TWAU* (dc), 7). This exposition, reminiscent of those of larger sagas set in fictional worlds, has a twofold effect. First, it reveals the setting and the characters right away. The second effect is more apparent when considering the panel as a whole. This introduction, as well as the following temporal caption – "sometime after midnight" (*TWAU* (dc), 7) – are both written in a regular comic font, placed within a simple rectangle frame on a blue background, with the exception of the word "Fables". The text of the captions and their visual aspects, along with the dark, and somewhat dirty setting, conveys the stark difference in tone between *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) and *Legends in Exile* (see 2.1) before the story truly begins.

This first panel also contains a new feature: captions containing Bigby's thoughts. This inner monologue is what triggers a detective fiction schema. The text in the captions itself is written in a different font, one reminiscent of handwriting (thus visually representing someone's own thoughts), on a pale-yellow background in the shape of a torn piece of a paper. The first one of these inner monologue captions reads "Got a call from **Mr. Toad**. Formerly of Toad Hall, now of this shithole tenement in Cambria Heights" (*TWAU* (dc), 7). This first instance of an inner monologue in the comic already contains all of the monologue captions' different features. The caption positions readers at Cambria Heights. This use of Bigby's monologue is fairly common throughout the comic, and has a more immersive effect than spatiotemporal captions, such as the temporal one discussed above. This short text also demonstrates how the contextual background is often provided to readers through these monologue captions: "Formerly of Toad Hall, now of this shithole tenement". Furthermore, it reveals the contempt the fairy tale element is held in throughout *The Wolf Among Us* (dc). This harsh tone, frequent use of swearwords, and short, curt sentences, as well as the presence of inner monologue in itself, together bring forth a specific type of detective fiction schema: hard-boiled detective fiction.

Hard-boiled fiction "describes the terse writing and violent plots identified with the postwar school of detective literature" (Yarbrough, 2149). Yarbrough also notes that "Often, but by no means always, the stories are narrated in a laconic first-person vocie [*sic*]" (2154), and "later hard-boiled protagonists are typically laconic, understated, and unflappable wisecrackers" (2153). The first inner monologue caption already demonstrates these typical characteristics of hard-boiled fiction. This genre is the most dominant one throughout the comic, with fairy tale being pushed back or downright mocked.

Figure 9: Sound effects, 2 (*TWAU* (dc), 8). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Once Bigby enters the apartment building, he can hear the violent noises coming from upstairs, "**CRUNCH**" and "**SMASSH**" (*TWAU* (dc), 8), represented as onomatopoeia, or sound effects, in yellow and red colors, respectively (see Figure 9). They are placed near the upper edge of the panels and spatially represent where the sound is coming from – the upper floor of the building. Sound effects such as these are much more common than they are in *Legends in Exile*, and, especially in fight scenes, place *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) closer to the superhero genre. Bigby walks up the rundown stairwell, thinking about The Woodsman, the problematic tenant Mr. Toad called about. This inner monologue is split into several captions (henceforth, I mark the split between speech bubbles or captions with the symbol "|"): "Me and The Woodsman? | We go way back. | Maybe you know the story. | Or the 'official' version of it, at any rate. | What a big **mouth** he has. | All the better for him to get into **trouble**, my dear" (9). Again, Bigby's thoughts, in addition to showing his character, provide background information to readers and demean the fairy tale aspect, foregrounding the hard-boiled schema. While he does think he has "to play it cool" (9), as he is there to uphold the law, and he will do "the civil thing" (9), as he is about to knock, he hears The Woodsman threatening a woman, and decides to kick in the door. Bigby and the Woodsman get into a violent fight. Here, sound effects are used, as they are in similar scenes throughout *The Wolf Among Us* (dc): "**PTOO**" (10), "**CRASH**" (11) or "**SHUNK**" (13), for example. All of these are visually similar to the example in Figure 9 above. Additionally, interjections are also common, such as "**HYAAA!**" or "**OOF!**" (12). This frequent usage of onomatopoeia in fight scenes is typical of superhero genre, while the interjections (especially in comparison with *Legends in Exile*, where I have counted only three instances of these) create a more grounded and gritty effect. Combined, they once again reinforce the hard-boiled detective (or noir) schema.

The hard-boiled genre is evident in the way characters, especially women, are portrayed. Yarbrough points out that "Typically, women in such stories are depicted as victims in need of saviors […] Quite often, women clients, love interests, or temptresses are revealed to be the villains of the stories" (2154). The fight between Bigby and The Woodsman is rather brutal. The Woodsman attacks Bigby with an axe, Bigby breaks The Woodsman's jaw and fingers, they even fall through the window onto the street. But it is the hitherto unknown woman that saves Bigby by swinging the axe into the back of The Woodsman's head. While it would

appear that she can take care of herself, in her subsequent conversation with Bigby, it emerges that she is a prostitute in trouble. She is bruised, owes a lot of money, and is not allowed to even say who she works for. Without giving her name, she disappears. Later, we find out that this woman is Faith, a princess from the Donkeyskin tale. Few hours later, her head is found on the Woodlands' doorstep. Returning back to Woodlands after the events at Cambria Heights, Bigby encounters Beauty, sneaking out in the middle of the night. She is behaving suspiciously, obviously hiding something – she even asks Bigby not to tell Beast, Beauty's husband, that Bigby saw her. Immediately after, Bigby runs into Beast. Bigby only tells Beast that he does not want to get mixed up in their problems, but Beast nonetheless states that "something's going on. | I **know** it" (*TWAU* (dc), 30). These two encounters put Beauty into an unfavorable light, although it is not yet clear whether or not she is in trouble, or a villain.

Even Snow White – the third woman introduced – is shown as a "damsel in distress", albeit not as overtly. At this point, Snow is an assistant to the Deputy Mayor, Ichabod Crane. With the introduction of Crane, the horror schema returns. In addition to the origin of the character itself, the way in which he is first introduced in the Business Office participates in this effect. In *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), the Business Office feels small and crowded, despite the large objects depicted in the background, as shown in Figure 10. In *Legends in Exile*, a double page spread is used to highlight the importance of the place. The limitations of the digital medium are palpable here, as the format does not allow for double page spreads. More than the layout, however, it is the color which has an effect on how the place is perceived: dark and bathed in green light, the Business Office feels more like a dungeon than a place of importance. The visual clues of the place and Crane's behavior create an anxious atmosphere. Here, Crane is just as cowardly and arrogant, if not more, as he is in Washington Irving's story. This comes out in his behavior toward others, but especially Snow White. When she and Bigby come to talk to him, Crane berates Bigby for how he conducts the investigation, and unfairly chastises Snow White for losing an expensive bottle of wine: "So-called 'assistant' can't do **anything** right" (*TWAU* (dc), 46). Worse, as it turns out, Crane is obsessed with Snow. He stalks her, and he frequents prostitutes whom he has disguised as Snow White with glamour while he is with them. While unaware, Snow is a victim of sexual harassment.

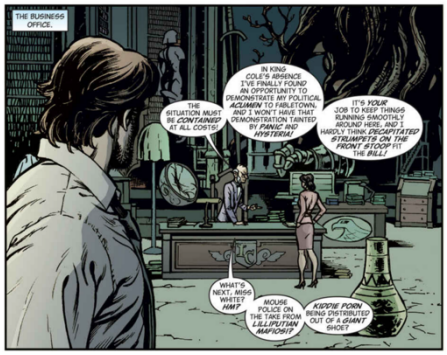

Figure 10: Business Office (*TWAU* (dc), 45). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Hard-boiled detective fiction is the dominant genre of *The Wolf Among Us*. Fairy tale is only the backdrop and mocked throughout, and magic is used for nefarious purposes. Even when Bigby uses the Magic Mirror to find The Woodsman, the picture Mirror shows is crude, depicting The Woodsman sitting on a toilet. Sound effects, typical of superhero comics, emphasize the brutality present throughout the comic. But it is not just this gloomy and raw atmosphere, use of dark colors and night setting, sexist treatment of women, or the presence of Bigby's inner monologue, which make the genre dominant. The structure of the plot, and, more importantly, the affordances of the medium and how they facilitate the inclusion of readers play a significant role, as I discuss next.

2.3 Detective Fiction as an Interactive Genre

Legends in Exile and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) are almost polar opposites in the atmosphere they create, both in their visual properties and content. One is dominated by bright colors and daytime scenes, the other by a darker palette. Even the daytime scenes in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) appear gloomy. In both of these works there is a very similar scene, where Bigby and Snow White share a taxi ride: in *Legends in Exile,* they are on their way to Rose Red's apartment (shown in Figure 11), and in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) they are heading to visit prince Lawrence, Faith's boyfriend (depicted in Figure 12). While both scenes are taking place early during the day, *Legends in Exile*'s is much more vibrant. The hue cast over the scene in *The Wolf Among Us* takes away the variety in colors, creating a less lively effect. A similar filter is used in the majority of the daytime scenes throughout the analyzed portion of the digital comic. The one exception is a scene where Bigby is questioning Jack and Rose Red about The Woodsman's whereabouts. This visual and character callback further highlights the contrast in the color scheme between the two works.

Figure 11: Bigby and Snow in a taxi, 1 (*LE*, 25). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Figure 12: Bigby and Snow in a taxi, 2 (*TWAU* (dc), 63). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The conversation between Snow and Bigby in these scenes is illustrative of the differences in content as well. In *Legends in Exile*, Snow White is incredulous that Bigby had

"**Jack** guard the **crime scene**? Isn't that like asking the fox to guard the hen house?" (*LE*, 25). It is obvious to readers that Snow White knows Jack very well. On the other hand, in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), Snow White is upset because she did not know Faith. She explains that "if I want to be an effective public **servant**, I should know who the public **is**, shouldn't I? (*TWAU* (dc), 63). While her familiarity with Jack could stem simply from him being her sister's boyfriend, as I have noted above, in *Legends in Exile* the Fables community does know each other well. In *The Wolf Among Us*, not even the sheriff knew who Faith was, or who the criminal element could be. Keeping in mind that *The Wolf Among Us* (vg and dc) is set before the events of *Legends in Exile*, an interesting question emerges: how can the audience reconcile the differences between the two stories? The answer lies in genre, and the influence of medium on genre.

In the genre analyses above, I have sought to highlight the genre-specific tropes and characteristics across the two comics and established them as clue-puzzle and hard-boiled fiction, respectively. There are further features which I have not covered yet. For instance, in clue-puzzles, by catching the culprit, the detective restores moral order, and "the novel will not contain any blanket indictments of society" (Canfield Reisman, 1905). This is how *Legends in Exile* ends: Bigby exposes Rose and Jack's scheme, Bluebeard receives his money back, and the story is concluded. In contrast, hard-boiled fiction is "almost always set within large urban environments that are run by corrupt institutions" (Yarbrough, 2153). Both of the stories are set in New York City, however, as I have discussed in 2.1, in *Legends in Exile* the setting is the closed Fables community. The urban aspect plays a much more significant role in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc and vg). Furthermore, the society is led by a corrupted deputy mayor, who does the bidding of the criminal underworld. The removal of Crane, and instating of Snow, who very clearly cares about the community, explains the transition between the two storyworlds. In other words, it is the very contrasting generic properties which bring the two genres together.

The properties of the medium are what create the differences between the two works. Of course, much of it has to do with stylistic or artistic choices. Here I only discuss the aspects which can be traced to the presence of an interactive element. The estrangement and increased violence amongst Fables is one of these. The presence of aggressive suspects or gang members, such as The Woodsman or the Tweedle twins, enforcers employed by Crooked Man, is quite typical for hard-boiled novels. In the game, this also allows for a more extended involvement from players. Specifically, in encountering this "criminal element", players often need to combat or chase suspects. Should this aspect not be present, players' agency would be restricted

to dialogue choices and occasionally clicking on objects (I discuss the mechanics and the impact thereof in more detail in the next chapter). This is of course a valid game style in the case of *The Wolf Among Us* (vg), however, the presence of these action sequences simultaneously takes advantages of the medium affordances and the generic qualities.

The estrangement between Fables creates a more interesting gameplay experience as well. While players might be familiar to varying degrees with at least some of the characters, they would not know this specific version of them. For example, Snow's disbelief at Bigby letting Jack guard the crime scene in *Legends in Exile* works in the comic as a worldbuilding device. If there was a similar event in the video game, it would have been the players who would have to decide who guards the crime scene. To that end, players would need to make an informed decision, instead of being chastised after the fact. Perhaps ironically, the unfamiliarity between Fables affords players to make unbiased decisions. More importantly it makes the investigation possible in the first place: if Bigby already knew who the victim was, and that she was involved with Crooked Man, the investigation (and therefore the game) would conclude already in the first episode.

Players still need to know the principal players, however. To this end, the game includes a so-called "Book of Fables", an in-game encyclopedia. At the beginning of the game, all of the entries are locked. The first entries are unlocked after Bigby's conversation with Mr. Toad shortly after arriving at the tenement building. These entries are "Bigby Wolf", "Mr. Toad", "Fabletown", "The Farm", and "The Glamours". That is, the two characters players have interacted with, and the topics of the conversation, in which Bigby threatens Mr. Toad, who indeed looks like a toad, with sending him to the Farm if he does not purchase a glamour. Once Bigby's fight with The Woodsman is over, players unlock the following entry:

> The Woodsman is one of the few men who went toe to toe with Bigby in his Black Forest days and lived to tell the tale. In an attempt to save Little Red Riding Hood, he split the great wolf's belly open with his axe, filled him full of rocks, and threw the beast into a river. To his dismay his popularity faded. Even his name is forgotten, and he is only known as The Woodsman (*TWAU* (vg), Book of Fables).

This information about the character is very different to the one given in Bigby's inner monologue (see 2.2). First, the tone, while still having a certain sarcastic quality, is much more reminiscent of the fairy tale it references. Second, this information is available to players only

after they encounter The Woodsman, giving them an opportunity to make their choices in an unbiased fashion.

This condensed approach of providing information to players, reflected in the comic adaptation in Bigby's inner monologue, has the biggest effect on how readers process the two stories. In all the works, Snow White is participating in Bigby's investigation. In *Legends in Exile* she even takes the role of a narrator when she, quite literally, retells parts of the investigation when she is updating the Mayor, King Cole, on their progress. A video game where players should themselves solve the crime could not be played if the investigation was relayed to players through someone else's point of view, as players actively affect the story. They also need to have simultaneously not too much information so that there is still a story left to discover, yet also enough to be able to make informed decisions. This is provided in the game's encyclopedia and reflected in Bigby's narration in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) and facilitated by the unfamiliarity of Fables themselves. This inclusion of inner monologue and estrangement of characters both draw the game's medium and genre into focus.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

The genre analysis of the comics *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* shows them to be very different works. *Legends in Exile* is a light-hearted clue-puzzle. At this point of the *Fables* series, the fairy tale characters live in a fairly idyllic community, where even a bloody murder is nothing more than a frivolous matter with no real consequences. The hard-boiled detective fiction *The Wolf Among Us*, on the other hand, is set in a cold-blooded world, rife with murder, exploitative prostitution, and corruption – as far away from fairy tale as possible. Yet it may be these very properties of these different genres which eventually connect the stories together. The interactive aspect of the video game adds to the harsher atmosphere of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc and vg). In addition to the violence players guide Bigby through, and the estrangement of the characters, it also effects how the investigation plays out. Rather than having a clue-puzzle chronicler giving readers hints, in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), readers are privy to Bigby's thoughts. The most important aspect of both clue-puzzles and video games is the inclusion of the audience. The role of the narrator, and exactly what is shown to readers or players, is the key to understanding how the different media and genres facilitate the inclusion of the audience. This is the topic of the following chapter.

3. Narration and Focalization

Analyzing narrators is a complex issue due to the visual nature of the medium. Kai Mikkonen notes in *The Narratology of Comic Art* that the traditional distinction between narrators and focalizers is no longer sufficient. Both the narration and the focus of perception are now present in visual modes in addition to the textual ones (in this case, for example, text within captions or speech bubbles). Therefore, we must consider not only who sees and who perceives, but also what is shown, and how it is shown (153). These questions are especially pertinent if we consider the nature of *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) not only because of the visual aspect of the comics, but also because of how their nature as detective fiction shapes the manner in which information is presented.

Canfield Reisman defines clue-puzzles as "mysteries in which both detectives and readers are provided with the same clues at the same time, enabling the readers to follow the sleuths' investigation step by step, assessing clues and arriving at solutions to the crimes as quickly as the investigators do" (1901). In *Legends in Exile*, Bigby, at the beginning of his "parlor scene" (see 3.1), says that "if this were a work of **fiction**, the author would pause the story **here** to ask the readers if they'd put all the clues together yet" (*LE*, 100). We can, in fact, presume that this is indeed Willingham asking readers if they have solved the puzzle. Similarly, approaching *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) as an adaptation of a video game, we need to consider how much the audience is offered in terms of engagement (or investigation) with the clues. Thus, the key for these kinds of stories to facilitate readers' engagement in solving the crime is in how much they actually reveal: what is shown, and how it is shown. In the following analyses, I adopt Mikkonen's approach on focusing on "the varying relations between a narrative voice, the verbal focaliser (i.e. the one who perceives things in verbal narration), the centre of visual perception (or visual focaliser), and the centre of attention (the visual focalised)" (147-148). The focal point is the facilitation of reader involvement in the detective investigations.

3.1 Narration and Focalization in *Legends in Exile*

Rather than a narrator, Mikkonen uses the term *narrative agency* to "refer to the ways in which a comic may acknowledge the source of narrative discourse". He continues that "Ultimately, however, such acknowledgement depends on the reader's awareness and construction of that agency" (129). On the textual level, *Legends in Exile* signals presence of such narrative agency. The opening captions "Once upon a time. | In a fictional land called

New York City" (*LE*, 11) do not only signal a fairy tale genre, but a fairy tale narrator as well. This narrator appears in two other places. Chapter four, "Remembrance Day", begins with the captions "And just like that, the big day arrived. | Fabletown's grandest event of the year, like Christmas and Fourth of July multiplied many times over" (*LE*, 81). Visually, the temporal caption is similar to the "Once upon a time" collocation (discussed in 2.1), sharing the same drop cap and parchment frame, albeit in a light blue color. Lastly, the comic concludes with a caption "The End – for now" (*LE*, 125). This caption is also styled as if written on a parchment, and the "The End" is written in an ornate font. This visual and textual styling signals this "higher level" narrator, and the placement of these captions – beginning, middle, and end – shows that this narrator in a way frames the entire story. We can, then, assume that on a textual level, the story is told to us by some narrating entity.

We can, to some degree, also assume that this implied narrator shows us the story as well. Rather than delving into the identity of the narrator, it is more pertinent to examine how the story is shown. Returning to the previous discussion on layout (see 2.1), the layout in *Legends in Exile*, meaning "the organisational structure 'external' to panels (i.e. panels relative to each other), rather than 'internal' to panels (i.e. the composition of elements within an image)" (Cohn et al., 67) is rather straightforward. Most pages favor a simple grid structure, and there is no visual symbolism in the layout, broken reading paths, or other devices which would require readers to work harder to arrive at the meaning. In fact, as I have demonstrated earlier, layout itself can be used in meaning making, for example when the Business Office is depicted across a double page spread. In addition to it being atypical in terms of layout, this scene, as seen in Figure 4, is also an exception to how characters are portrayed.

In most of the panels which feature characters, they are shown from medium shots, "a shot typically framing a character from the waist up, showing the character's face and gestures" (Bateman et al., 331), such as when Jack arrives at Bigby's office, as depicted in Figure 3, or when Snow and Bigby are in a taxi, shown in Figure 11. The Business Office, however, is shown from an extreme long shot, "from a considerable distance giving an overall sense of the setting" (Bateman et al., 331). Looking closer, we see that Buffkin, the Fabletown librarian, is flying at the right half of the image. Although he takes quite a bit of the subcanvas' physical space, he is not very noticeable. This is in part due to the inset panels, which partly cover him, but also due to him being shadowed. The focus is then on the space of the Business Office, rather than Buffkin (compare this, for example, with the opening of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), shown in Figure 8, where Bigby similarly frames the scene but still remains prominent). The

Business Office is, in a way, depicted from Buffkin's spatial point of view. Yet by him being pushed away from readers' attention, he is not an active participant in the scene, but rather an observer – much like the readers are. Buffkin is therefore used as a device which brings readers closer to the long distance shots while still remaining a neutral observer. This kind of framing is found in similar Business Office scenes throughout *Legends in Exile*. There is another character used in a similar manner, Colin, one of the three little pigs who lost their home to Bigby back in the Homelands. Colin has run away from the Farm and found his way to Bigby's apartment. Bigby lets him spend the night and promptly sends him back to the Farm, but Colin escapes the transport and appears repeatedly throughout *Legends in Exile*. One example of this is when Colin sleeps in the bushes at Woodlands, as shown in Figure 5. There, in addition to Colin being a device bringing distance frames closer to readers, the speech bubbles coming out of the building are also used in positioning readers.

This is better illustrated in the following example in Figure 13. This panel opens a scene between Snow White and her ex-husband, Prince Charming. The image is shown from a medium shot, with non-Fable pedestrians in the front of the scene, walking on a busy street, as well as several cars. Snow and Charming sit inside the diner across the street, yet readers are privy to their discussion, thanks to the speech bubble and the small markings at its tail, denotating the source of the sound. Realistically, someone on the opposite side of the street – such as the passersby at the foreground of the image – could not hear what is said. The affordance of the medium allows for an introduction of the setting, in this case, a busy city street, while simultaneously depicting a private conversation taking place inside the restaurant (another example of this is shown in Figure 2, where Jack is in the taxi rushing to Bigby's office). This use of non-essential characters in the foreground along with the speech bubbles again situates readers in the role of neutral observers.

Figure 13: Distant view (*LE*, 42). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Legends in Exile contains embedded narration, where various characters take on the role of homodiegetic narrators. I divide these embedded narrations into two types. The first case is King Cole's speech during Remembrance Day Feast, an annual memorial day where Fables celebrate and remember their Homelands. In this speech, he recounts the Fables' escape

Figure 14: King Cole's speech (*LE*, 85). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

from Homelands, in a very distinctive style: "Once we were a thousand kingdoms, spread over a hundred magic worlds" (*LE*, 85). What he recounts is shown to readers, again in a very unique graphic style, as shown in Figure 14. All of these panels have their own, torn parchment-styled frame, and the images have a pink accent to them. As Mikkonen notes, visual narratives can mark focalization with, for example, color schemes or individual styles (154). The almost fairy tale rhetoric, and particularly the visual style, denote King Cole's own subjective view, or rather, presentation, of the events that transpired. Establishing subjectivity in King Cole's speech is important when examining the second type of embedded narration, flashbacks. Unlike King Cole's speech, these flashbacks are specifically presenting information pertinent to the investigation, be it suspects' statements or important backstories, such as Rose Red being shown as a party animal. In other words, these flashbacks provide important clues to readers. There are two specific examples of flashbacks I feel are important to this discussion. The first one is that of Snow White reporting to King Cole on the progress of the investigation, and the flashbacks shown during Bigby's parlor scene.

The key to facilitating readers' engagement in a detective story such as this is how much is actually revealed to them. To this end, the story is often presented to readers by a sidekick, a chronicler of sorts – a device created by Edgar Allan Poe in his "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", where it is an anonymous narrator who retells detective Dupin's tale (Nelles, 1947), and popularized by Doyle's Dr. Watson. In her report to King Cole, Snow White briefly takes on this role. The significance of Snow acting as a chronicler lies not in the summarization of the suspect interviews she and Bigby have conducted, but in her comments on these. For example, when Snow mentions that Bigby has rudely accused Bluebeard of being the killer, she states that "Our theory with **him** is that he got **jealous** when Rose dumped him to go back to Jack, so he did his trademark horrible thing to her. | But the problem with **that** scenario is that, in the past, his **M. O.** was to kill them only **after** wedding them" (*LE*, 61). In other words, in this narration act, Snow offers the readers theories and opinions on the clues shown. In doing so, Snow preserves the objectivity of Bigby as a detective. Readers then are provided some hypotheses but cannot be guided to the solution based on the detective's thoughts.

What Bigby as a detective is thinking is only revealed during the parlor scene. There, Bigby recounts the investigation, and how he arrived at the solution. As he talks, the various

clues are shown in the form of flashbacks, as seen in Figure 15. Here, Bigby shares the conclusion he has drawn from Rose Red's CDs thrown on the floor: "But she was only willing to sacrifice the CD's she **didn't** like so much -- the ones in the **back** -- to scatter on the floor. | The CD's she played **most** -- the ones in the **front** -- were untouched" (*LE*, 109). The visual style itself is the same as that of the rest of *Legends in Exile*, or narrative present; however, the prominence of the pink color and the ornate framing are reminiscent of King Cole's speech. However, the pink here is not used as an accent, rather the entire scene is literally painted pink. In fact, this scene is, apart from the color and the panel order, a copy of Bigby's initial walkthrough of the crime scene, as shown in Figure 16.

Figure 15: Crime scene flashback (*LE*, 109). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

In the flashback, Bigby is clearly marked as the speaker. More interesting here, however, is the question of focalization. The focus of perception are the various clues. We do look at them at a similar angle as Bigby does, but not the same – his feet are shown from a position of someone standing in front of him. Bigby's role is now similar to Buffkin and Colin in the cases described above. Bigby as a sort of an objective focalizer guides the view of an impartial observer, in this case, the readers. We can draw several conclusions from this. The use of this scene in the flashback shows that the ornate framing and filter used (variations of which are used in all of the other investigative flashbacks) mark temporality, rather than subjectivity. This in turn signals that the information provided to readers in these flashbacks is accurate. Of course, the homodiegetic speaker of these embedded narrations might lie, as, for example, Jack does, but the clues are not distorted by a subjective interpretation on behalf of the speaker, rather intentional deception.

Figure 16: Crime scene, 1 (*LE*, 30). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

Above I have argued that readers are not influenced by the detective's thoughts or opinions. One exception to this is Bigby's reaction to Flycatcher's and Boy Blue's phone call, depicted in Figure 17. Bigby is covering his face behind his hand, with his head tilted down. From his slumped body, readers may infer that Bigby is shaken by the news of Rose Red's

death. During the parlor scene, Bigby does in fact admit that he considered Rose might truly be dead: "I didn't know she **wasn't** dead. In fact, I had pretty compelling evidence that she **was**" (*LE*, 111). The evidence Bigby speaks of is the amount of blood found at the apartment, but earlier Bigby also found signs of a padlock having been installed on Rose Red's freezer, which is clearly shown to readers. Readers could deduce already in the first crime scene walkthrough that Rose Red has stored her blood there, which she drained herself slowly and carefully over an extended period of time. In other words, deducting that Rose Red has been murdered is, in fact, another way of misleading readers. Notice that in Figure 17, Bigby's face is hidden. We cannot see his facial expression, and it is unclear whether he is sad, upset that he needs to mislead Snow, tired, or whether he is simply frustrated after having to deal with Flycatcher and Boy Blue. Information is thus almost always presented to readers in a neutral way, and when misdirection is present, it is nevertheless done in a manner which provides readers with the clues necessary to figure out the truth for themselves.

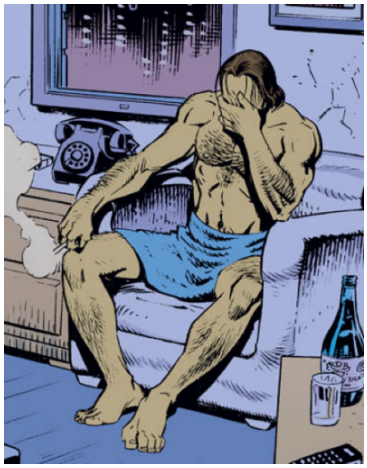

Figure 17: Bigby's reaction (*LE*, 77). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

3.2 Narration and Focalization in *The Wolf Among Us* (Digital Comic)

The implied narrator of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) is much less prominent than that of *Legends in Exile*. The opening exposition (see 2.2) may trigger a particular schema in some readers, that of fantasy or sci-fi sagas. These genres, however, do not necessarily carry the same level of acknowledgment of narrative agency as it does in fairy tales. The spatiotemporal captions do not overtly imply a specific form of narration either, neither in their textual nor visual properties. All of these captions are written in a very neutral style, for example, "The Woodland Luxury Apartments. | Upper West Side, Manhattan. | Well after Midnight" (*TWAU* (dc), 27). As discussed in 2.2, all of these captions are written in a regular comic font, a capitalized, slightly cursive, handwritten-like font. They are placed within a light blue rectangular box, and are only reminiscent of a general comic, or perhaps superhero comic, schemas. In other words, on the textual level, this narration agency, or an overall implied narrator, is almost immediately pushed into the background in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc).

Bigby's narration is much more prominent. His inner monologue is used consistently throughout and has its own textual and visual style, distinguishing it from other narrations, such

as in flashbacks, which I analyze below. The font in which Bigby's thoughts are written in is reminiscent of handwriting, and the frame itself is shaped as torn paper (see Figure 8, or Figure 21 below). Earlier I have discussed how *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) uses Bigby's narration in the context of genre. I return to these uses in terms of narration. After Bigby and Snow are berated by Ichabod Crane in the Business Office, Crane storms out, leaving the two of them there. Bigby narrates that "My boiling blood has returned to a simmer now that **Crane** has left. | Without that impervious jackass breathing down our necks, **Snow** and I can get to work on putting a name to the face of the victim" (*TWAU* (dc), 48). Here, Bigby positions readers temporally: the story continues shortly after Crane left. Bigby's monologue replaces temporal captions, and Bigby takes on the role of the implied extradiegetic narrator. In addition to his subjective commentary ("that impervious jackass"), Bigby also informs readers what is currently happening with the investigation, that is, that they are now trying to identify the victim. This example further shows that on the textual level Bigby and the comics' extradiegetic narrator are concurrent.

The flashbacks in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) deal with various character backstories which are not directly related to the investigation. These backstories are told by various homodiegetic narrators and differ greatly in their textual and visual styles. These flashbacks could be divided into two different types. An example of the first one is when Bigby asks about The Woodsman in the Trip Trap, Fabletown's local dive bar. Grendel, a giant under glamour, defends The Woodsman: "I'll tell you the story of what **this** fucking guy did. | He's, like, in the **forest** and shit, and he comes up on this fine little piece of ass with a basket of goodies for her granny, right?" (*TWAU* (dc), 104-105). The story is shown in a style reminiscent of underground comics (see Figure 18), and very fitting of Grendel's narration style. I argue that this style reflects how Grendel himself pictures the story. In other words, this flashback (and similar others, which deal with the fairy tale character backstories) are embedded narrations not only told, but also shown both to readers and other characters, by the homodiegetic narrator telling the story.

Figure 18: Grendel's flashback (*TWAU* (dc), 105). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The second type of flashbacks also deals with the fairy tale backstories of characters. These, however, are told from a more grounded point of view. The story of Little Red Riding Hood is told once again, this time by The Woodsman himself. After he is arrested by Bigby,

the two walk back to The Woodlands. He starts narrating the story about how he, in fact, was a thief who only stumbled on The Big Bad Wolf because he himself was going to rape Little Red Riding Hood. As he talks, the story is unfolding next to them, as shown in Figure 19. As they walk, the background around them slowly changes from buildings into trees, cars into forest wildlife. Rather than cutting into a different narration scene, the two walk into it. In Figure 19, Bigby is leading The Woodsman in handcuffs, and the two of them are looking down at the flashback-Woodsman, passed out nearby Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother's house. In this flashback, The Woodsman is, quite literally, showing the story to Bigby. The question of who is showing this to readers is much harder to answer. The visual style does not differ much from the present-day storyline, and the story itself is a "true version" of an event. This adds at least some objectivity to this flashback, but that is not a sufficient argument for this flashback being shown by the implied narrator of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), and the identity of the narrator (implied narrator, Bigby, or The Woodsman) might differ from reader to reader based on their readings of the story. It is the ambiguity, rather than establishing the "correct" narrator, which holds importance.

Figure 19: The Woodsman's flashback (*TWAU* (dc), 126). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The ambiguity is present throughout the present-day storyline and brings forth the question of objectivity of the narrator. In 2.2 I have discussed how women in *The Wolf Among Us* are heavily typified as damsels in distress or seductive temptresses. This is apparent not only in their behavior, but in the way they are shown to readers. This goes beyond clothing or doe eyes, as is illustrated in Figure 20. This scene shows Bigby finding Beauty suspiciously sneaking out in the middle of the night. In the first panel of the page, Beauty tells Bigby she has to run, and in the second panel, she is asking Bigby not to tell Beast he saw her, as she seductively leans closer, placing her hand on his chest. In the third panel, Bigby removes her hand. Next, Bigby is questioning her: "You gonna tell me what it is you're up to? Why you need this run-in a **secret** from your own **husband**?" (TWAU (dc), 29). The accusatory tone already places Beauty in the role of a suspect, but the bolded

Figure 20: Bigby encounters Beauty (*TWAU* (dc), 29). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

words – "secret" and "husband" paint her as an adulteress. Although Beauty's answer, "…I **can't** right now. I'll explain it **all** to you later", with the typographical emphasis of the word "can't", indicates that she might be in trouble, rather than having an affair. It is the layout of this page which emphasizes to readers Beauty's suspicious behavior. While the rest of the page consists of separate, framed panels, the above analyzed interaction is spatially singled out. The two characters are removed from the grid and placed directly on the white background. This draws attention to their body language, Bigby in an aggressive pose, with his hands on his hips, looking down at Beauty, and her hands folded on her chest and head down. The layout further highlights Beauty's suspicious behavior. Thus, who shows here is complicit in creating a bias as to how readers view Beauty, putting the objectivity of this narrative agency into question.

Readers are rarely acknowledged as outside observers in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc). Of course, this lack of acknowledgment is not at all atypical of comics. Nevertheless, it is important to include here. Looking at the differences between similar scenes in *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) demonstrates why. Figure 21 shows Bigby and Snow in the Business Office, shortly after Crane's departure. Most of the scenes within the comic are shown from medium or close-up shots, which focus on the face and facial expression of characters (Bateman et al., 331), with the occasional long shot, as seen in Figure 21. Note that here, readers are only privy to Bigby's thoughts, rather than any dialogue. In fact, there is only one instance in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) where sound is shown in a way that only readers could hear (or rather, see). This is when Bigby and Snow are in a taxi together (see 2.3). In two panels of this scene, the car is shown from outside, and the speech bubbles show Bigby and Snow's dialogue, similarly to the opening scene of *Legends in Exile* (see again Figure 2). Other than this one occurrence, characters do not tend to talk until the scene transitions to a closer shot.

Figure 21: Snow and Bigby in Business Office (*TWAU* (dc), 48). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

The Business Office scene in Figure 21 is missing the framing device which would bring readers closer, as Buffkin does in the *Legends in Exile* scene (see 3.1). These devices are not completely missing from the comic, however. Rather, it is Bigby who frames such scenes, as shown in Figures 8 and 10. These scenes can be characterized as over-the-shoulder images, where "the image may be shown, for instance, from behind a character's back, close to the character's viewing position, or in conformity to the character's direction of looking"

(Mikkonen, 168). This type of image is one of five techniques Mikkonen lists as subjectifying devices in comics. Another example of this technique is a point-of-view image, which "assumes the viewer's position; the image frame functions as the representation of someone's gaze and a field of vision" (Mikkonen, 166). An example of this is found in Figure 22. In this scene, Bigby is coming to after being overpowered by the Tweedle twins. The shape of this panel is reminiscent of a lens, mimicking one's eye. Snow is also shown twice – double vision being a side effect of a brain injury or concussion. These images show that, outside of flashbacks, Bigby is adding a lot of visual subjectivity to the comic. Not only is he the one who perceives, but often he is also the one who shows. Together with his narration on a textual level, this shows an ambiguity of the implied narrator. This ambiguity, in turn, raises the issue of the reliability of the narrative agency.

Figure 22: Point-of-view image (*TWAU* (dc), 89). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

An unreliable narrator in detective fiction such as this changes how readers interact with the story. The level of unreliability, or even the identity of who is unreliable – the implied narrative agency or Bigby – is a topic for another thesis. What is important here is how the strong subjectivity of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) affects the investigation. In clue-puzzles, readers would now have to doubt not only the suspects, but the detective himself. While this is not necessarily an issue if employed carefully, such as Bigby's reaction to the phone call analyzed in 3.1, this kind of suspicion present throughout the entire story would impede the participation of readers. This leads to the question of how the investigation is dealt with in this comic.

Figure 23 shows a page from a scene in which Bigby investigates Toad's apartment. Toad has earlier called Bigby asking for help, but when Bigby and Snow arrive, Toad is acting suspiciously and refuses to tell them anything. The layout here takes on a distinct pattern. The scene begins with a panel focusing on Bigby and the apartment. On top of these panels are inset panels in the shape of a magnifying glass, whose shape focuses on specific details of the scene. These two panels are followed by a simple rectangular panel focusing on Toad. This panel arrangement reflects the formulaic nature of the investigation. First, the clue is specifically pointed out in the magnifying glass, such as a busted lock, while Bigby narrates out loud in the rectangular boxes: "This **lock's** busted. | Looks like somebody kicked in the door" (*TWAU* (dc) 94). Toad provides an explanation, such as the lock having been busted for a while. Bigby

notices another clue, e.g., an open window. The next panel, centered on Toad, shows him having a suspicious reaction, and making an excuse about having to climb in through the window after forgetting his keys. To this Bigby answers in the following panel: “But… you said yourself, the lock’s been busted for **weeks**. | You wouldn’t have **needed** your keys to get in the front door”, and as the page zooms in with the glass on the open window, “So why go to the trouble of **climbing into** a second-story window, Toad?” (*TWAU* (dc) 94). This causes Toad to react in anger, as shown in the last panel.

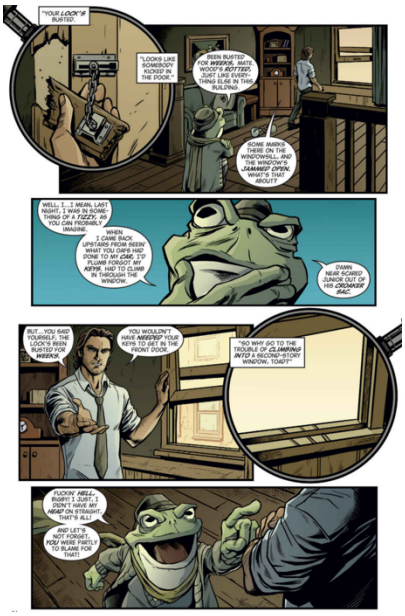

Figure 23: Crime scene, 2 (*TWAU* (dc), 94). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

There are several crucial observations to be made from this scene. The magnifying glass shows in detail exactly where Bigby’s center of attention is. Simultaneously, readers are made aware what the important clue is on the visual level. On the textual level, the clue and its significance are, quite literally, spelled out in Bigby’s narration. The particular focus on Toad’s suspicious reactions further signal that he is lying. In other words, the subjective bias in what is shown does not distort the clues or how readers can rely on them. Rather it has the opposite effect: the clues here are provided in such an obvious manner, it leaves no space for readers to get to the solution on their own. Considering that this comic is an adaptation of a video game where the player has to solve the crime on their own, this lack of room for reader engagement is quite striking.

3.3 Interactivity of a Story

To understand the paradox of an interactive element decreasing the level of engagement with the audience, we need to first consider the way the game itself facilitates this engagement. Given the constraints of this thesis, I focus only on the most relevant points of *The Wolf Among Us* (vg). The game mechanics are simple. The player controls the protagonist, Bigby Wolf, with keyboard or mouse commands. These are very limited (such as movement directions with WASD keys, or an object and inventory interaction with mouse buttons) and cannot be changed. This simplicity of controls makes the game very accessible to most audiences (although players who prefer custom controls might find themselves somewhat irritated). On occasions when the game does require players to take actions beyond simple movements, the

game provides extradiegetic hints. For example, during combats, the game shows which actions players need to take and when. Figure 24 depicts a screenshot from a fight scene between Bigby and The Woodsman. The picture of an S key, along with a red arrow pointing downwards, signals to players that they should press S in order to crouch and thus avoid getting hit by The Woodsman.

Figure 24: Combat scene (*TWAU* (vg), Episode: Faith). © Bill Willingham and DC Comics™ Bill Willingham (2013).

The combat mechanics reveal another way of how the game favors storytelling in lieu of gameplay. Note that the button prompt is the only extradiegetic feature. There is no HUD or minimap, as these are not needed given the ease of controls and the closed nature of the storyworld. The interesting point here is the lack of indicator of health, hit points, or any other combat elements. The combat system in this game is only minimally interactive. For the most part, the combat comprises of cutscenes, and players' actions are inconsequential. If players miss the button prompt, the combat carries on – players do not lose health, nor can Bigby die. This is a possibility only at the end of the fight. This, however, is preceded by a checkpoint where the game saves automatically. Should players miss the last prompt and lose, the game reloads just before the crucial interaction. The combat system thus demonstrates how the game mechanics are pushed into background in favor of the story. Paradoxically, this may cause players to be less immersed in the story itself. Their involvement in the game is minimal, as is the impact of their actions. As the game makes it close to impossible to lose combat, players might not feel any sense of pride and accomplishment from defeating the enemy. This, in turn, can diminish their investment in the game.

The save system is another example of the game mechanics pushing the story forward. The game does not allow for manual saves. Rather, the chapters in *The Wolf Among Us* (vg) are themselves divided into several subchapters. For instance, the first subchapter is called "Disturbance", and spans from the beginning of the game to Bigby leaving for the Woodlands after his conversation with Faith. In addition to checkpoints, the game saves automatically at each subchapter. If players want to replay certain sections, they need to replay the entire subchapter from the beginning (or from a checkpoint, if they have previously gotten to one). Fernández-Vara notes on saving that "How often we can save the game, if at all, conditions

how we play" (127). This goes both for players' actions as well as game mechanics. The save system in *The Wolf Among Us* (vg) discourages players from reversing their choices. For instance, it is very time consuming to browse through different outcomes from dialogue choices in order to choose the most preferable one.

This almost forcible focus on the story is reflected in the narration as well. As in the combat sequences, players have little opportunity to actually interact with the game. The game comprises largely of cutscenes or dialogue scenes, which are often combined. It is in these scenes where players have the biggest opportunity to impact the game through their dialogue choices (I discuss these choices in the next chapter). Outside of them, for the most part, players only need to navigate Bigby to a certain place to trigger the scenes. The game opens with a very film-like sequence: a collage of pictures depicting Central Park and New York skyscrapers is shown, then Bigby in a taxi on his way to Toad's. This sequence is intersected with credit screens. Once Bigby enters the building, he notices Toad without his glamour, and a dialogue scene begins. Following this, Bigby heads upstairs. It is only here where players can finally control Bigby's actions, not only his words. Even here the film-like quality is preserved. While the game does allow for controlling the camera view by moving the mouse, players can only push against the frame slightly in the four directions (left, right, up, and down). The camera follows Bigby as he moves, but it is not possible to rotate the camera or see anything significant beyond the presented frame. In other words, the game is shown from a fixed point of view.

Who shows is a much more complex issue in video games than in comics, and for the purpose of this analysis it suffices to say that we can assume some implied narrative entity which provides these fixed frames. On the textual level, the game has both extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative elements. Among the extradiegetic are credits, spatiotemporal captions, various in-game messages (such as notices about unlocking entries in the "Book of Fables"), dialogue options, subtitles (if players choose to have them displayed), object clues and button prompts. In addition, as the game begins, the game displays a screen with an exposition summary similar to the one comic, and a disclaimer: "This game series adapts to the choices you make. The story is tailored by how you play" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith). Outside of the gameplay, we find the game encyclopedia "Book of Fables" and its

Figure 25: Opening scene (*TWAU* (vg), Episode: Faith). © Bill Willingham and DC Comics™ Bill Willingham (2013).

entries, and texts related to the game's settings. The intradiegetic narration consists of speech uttered by characters (including Bigby's lines chosen in dialogues), and various notes, letters, and books. Figure 25 shows two of such narrative elements: extradiegetic spatiotemporal captions, and an intradiegetic text on a note in Bigby's hand, containing Toad's address. What is ostensibly missing from these narrative elements is Bigby's inner monologue.

Players are not privy to any mental processes of Bigby's. A large portion of the game consists of characterization, specifically, how players themselves choose to portray Bigby via various dialogue choices. The presence of Bigby's own thoughts would provide an undue bias to these choices. I return to this modelling of Bigby in the next chapter; here, I focus on focalization. In the cutscenes and dialogue scenes, Bigby is shown from various angles and various distances. Medium and close-up shots are preferred, as seen in the combat scene in Figure 24, or the over-the-shoulder image in Figure 25. There is one instance of a point-of-view image. As in the webcomic adaptation, after being knocked out by Tweedle Dum, when Bigby wakes up, the image fades in from black to concerned Snow, shown from a very low angle (no double vision, however). Rather than creating any ambiguity in the narration agency, the effect is stronger in terms of focalization, in that it reinforces that even outside of the sequences players control, Bigby remains the center of focalization.

In the game we can consider players to be the ones who perceive. Rather than being a focalizer, Bigby is used as a focalization device (cf. with Buffkin or passersby in 3.1). In the sequences where players can control Bigby's movement and interact with objects, Bigby is shown in various long shots, such as in Figure 26 below. This distance allows players to see their environment, and by controlling Bigby's movements, they have the illusion of being within said environment and being able to interact with it. The word illusion here is crucial. The cardinality of gameplay, that is the rules which define the gameplay mechanics (Fernández-Vara, 102), is very restrictive. In addition to the limited camera movement I have already discussed, the actual movement is also confined. Although players can choose the direction freely and go back-and-forth as they wish (unless they trigger a cutscene), players can only move along pre-defined paths. While these are not shown to the players, they are fairly apparent, for example, when in a park, players can only move along the walking paths, but not on grass. This removes a lot of agency from players, but more importantly, it ensures that they progress forward in the plot.

In some of the sequences where players control Bigby, they can interact with various objects in the game. This is especially significant during investigations, such as when Bigby is examining Toad's apartment, a shot of which is shown in Figure 26.[6] The white circle in the middle of the image is an object highlight. These are either always on or off (depending on players' settings) or can be toggled in game with a T key. If the object highlight is off, it only appears when players hover a cursor above an interactable object. Due to the fixed movement path, these objects are very hard to miss, even with the highlights turned off. Once the object highlight is visible, the circle includes small icons indicating possible actions, such as the eye in the Figure 26 above. Hovering above the icons reveal another extradiegetic textual element, a hint as to what the object is, and what the possible actions are: "Busted Latch, Examine" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith), shown in the left down corner of Figure 26. Clicking on the icon triggers a scene where Bigby performs said action, in this case, examining the lock. Here, also, Bigby states that "Your lock's busted" (Episode Faith),[7] which prompts Toad to give the excuse about the lock being broken for some time. When players find marks on the windowsill, and Toad explains it as him forgetting his keys and needing to get it, the game zooms in again on the broken lock. This reminds players about the previous clue, once again making it very hard to miss.

Figure 26: Investigation (*TWAU* (vg), Episode: Faith). © Bill Willingham and DC Comics™ Bill Willingham (2013).

In case that players would somehow miss the clue, the game provides a further hint in the dialogue that follows. The game offers four options: asking why Toad does not have spare keys, stating that Toad would not need keys, asking why his son did not let him in, and staying silent. Only the second option calls out Toad on his lie. After all the clues are examined, another dialogue is triggered, this time with only two options: either stating that Toad has been lying, or threatening Toad. Either action will result in Toad confessing that Tweedle Dum ransacked the apartment. Thus, it does not matter whether players realize that Toad is hiding something, since they do not even need to investigate at all. They can threaten him (and beat him) at any point, even before they interact with any clues whatsoever.

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[6] The grey icons to the left of the image are items in currently in the inventory. These are, however, not relevant to this discussion.

[7] Note that any direct speech from *The Wolf Among Us* (video game) is cited from the game's subtitles.

Legends in Exile uses its medium affordances to include readers in the detective investigation. It does so by showing the clues in an objective manner and leaving enough space for interpretation. The nature of the medium takes readers to the end of the story as well, regardless of whether or not they understood the clues. Yet this understanding is essential in reader engagement. The purpose of the parlor scene is to retroactively take readers through the investigation and show them that they had the clues all along. In *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) this understanding is lacking, which is a direct result of the video game mechanics, where players do not need to figure out the meaning of any of the clues in order to progress in the investigation. Any possibility of players not being able to solve the crime does not get in the way of the story being told. For example, at one point, Toad calls Bigby for help, and at the same time, the Magic Mirror shows Lawrence to be in distress. Players can choose if they want to first visit Toad's place or Lawrence's apartment. If they visit Lawrence's place last, it is one of the Tweedle twins who tells Bigby that The Woodsman is in the Trip Trap bar, and if they visit Toad second, it is Toad who tells Bigby where to find The Woodsman. He does so regardless of how Bigby treats him. Thus, while the story does tailor to the players' choices, this impact is fairly negligent. While allowing players to participate in the investigation, it is this very interactive element which diminishes the level of engagement with the work.

This is reflected in the webcomic adaptation as well. As in the game, the clues are not shown, but explicitly told, along with their meaning. Furthermore, Bigby's inner monologue and subjective point of view guide readers to the correct conclusion. For instance, unlike in the game, in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) Bigby needs to find information on The Woodsman on his own. He comes to this conclusion after, via his monologue, he explains to readers that neither Lawrence nor the Tweedle twins would have a motive to kill Faith, and the only person of interest left is The Woodsman. But instead of keeping readers guessing as to whether The Woodsman is a suspect, Bigby immediately notes that "Whatever the hell is going on here, The Woodsman knows **something**" (*TWAU* (dc), 101). The typographical emphasis on the word "something" denotes that while The Woodsman has some information, he is not the killer. Thus, this comic almost discourages readers from coming to their own conclusions and in this way, in participating in the story.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

In *Legends in Exile*, the narration is shown impartially despite the clearly marked fairy-tale narrator. The textual and visual differences between subjective recollections and

investigation flashbacks show that the clues presented are done so in a neutral way. Readers are acknowledged as impartial observers and brought closer with various devices, be it foregrounded figures or sound representation. Bigby serves as a focalizer in showing clues, but his own thoughts are unknown so as to allow readers to engage with the clues in an unbiased way. The narration thus facilitates readers' participation in solving the clue-puzzle. In *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), on the other hand, there is a high degree of subjectivity in the narration, mainly caused by the presence of Bigby's inner monologue. Any possible participation in investigating the crime is almost obstructed by the immediate explanation of clues and motives. Getting to the end of the story is more important than how this end is achieved. This is not despite, but *because* of the digital comic being an adaptation of a video game. As the main goal of *The Wolf Among Us* (vg) is playing through to the end, there are no possible penalties for, for example, arresting the wrong suspect. In fact, this is impossible to do. The game facilitates not investigating, but simply playing through. This then begs the question why the game even offers so many choices if their impact on the story itself is minimal. I assert that the answer lies in characterization.

4. Characterization

Amongst the myriad of Fable characters, Bigby Wolf is one of the most interesting ones. Albeit not the main protagonist of every *Fables* story, he is the main character of *Legends in Exile* and *The Wolf Among Us* (dc). He is also the player character in the video game. It is for this reason that I focus specifically on Bigby Wolf in this chapter. The choices in the game, especially the dialogue choices, allow players to model the character. This is the most interactive aspect of the game, and, as I demonstrate, also the one which halts immersion the most. Looking at the two other Bigby Wolfs, the one in *Legends in Exile* and the other in the webcomic *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), is once again useful in illustrating how the interactive version of him lacks a certain depth. In this analysis I also include a short story called "A Wolf in the Fold" included in *Legends in Exile* at the end of comic proper. While an additional material, this story is an important part of Bigby's characterization.

There are two theories which I employ in my analyses. James Phelan's description of characters as "participation in a mimetic sphere (due to the character's traits), a thematic sphere (as a representative of an idea or of a class of people), and a synthetic sphere (the material out of which the character is made)" (Jannidis, "Character"). This division effectively conveys how the characteristics of Bigby Wolf enable engagement with readers. With the video game

character, this offers an interesting opportunity to briefly examine how the mimetic aspect, namely, the character's presumed thoughts and mental processes, works when these very processes belong to the players steering the character as much as the character itself.

Marco Caracciolo notes on the mimetic aspect that

> when literary narrative devotes sustained attention to a character—usually, the protagonist or narrator—audiences can have the sense of 'getting to know' him or her as they would know a real person: they can understand the character's personality and past experiences, predict his or her behavior, or even project it outside of the fictional world to which the character belongs (8).

This concept of character-centered illusion is particularly useful in looking at how the video game allows players to play as Bigby Wolf. I do, however, use this concept in the comics analyses to allow for points of comparison.

4.1 Bigby Wolf in *Legends in Exile*

As the focalizer, Bigby Wolf's presence is minimized in order to let readers come to their own conclusions, without his overt influence. His role as a character is similar: Bigby is often used as a device in revealing information about other characters. Of course, other characters share this function as well. For example, the meeting between Snow and Beauty and Beast reveals much of the *Fables* storyworld. But it is Bigby who, at least in this first edition of *Fables*, is the most fleshed out character. In turn, characters tend to engage with him the most. I focus on three ways in which Bigby affords readers such engagement. As his own character, that is, in his mimetic processes, in addition to keeping readers interested in him, he also foregrounds other characters. As the former big bad wolf, now sheriff, Bigby also thematically symbolizes the complicated history of *Fables*. Finally, the way Bigby's qualities are portrayed – his synthetic aspect as a textual (and visual) device – Bigby fundamentally participates in readers' engagement with the storyworld.

Bigby's mental processes are often not outwardly stated. As I have explained in previous chapters, this is due to the objective nature of the narration, and Bigby, as a detective, does not sway readers one way or the other in the investigation. As it is shown at the end of *Legends in Exile*, Bigby has, of course, been mentally processing the clues all along. He is not, however, the mysterious silent type who would hide any of his detective skills from the readers.

On the way to Rose Red's apartment, Snow is bewildered that Bigby left Jack to watch over the crime scene. Bigby explains that Jack is "the **only** one I can trust to keep the scene safe, since he's the one who **discovered** it. If Jack wanted to alter the evidence he already did it **before** he came in to report the crime. | And if **that's** the case, he won't want anyone else coming along to further **alter** his alterations" (*LE*, 25). Snow counters that she is still mistrustful of Jack and disapproves of her sister dating him. Bigby answers that he "always got the impression that your open **disapproval** of Jack was the thing that Rose found **most** attractive in him" (25). This exchange demonstrates two things. First, Bigby's reasoning skills and second, his intimate knowledge of the persons involved. This gives readers a certain amount of trust in his capability as a detective. While in the ensuing crime scene walkthrough (see 3.1) readers need to sift through the clues presented and their meanings themselves, they know that Bigby does show them pertinent information.

Some of Bigby's personality can of course be inferred from his various suspect interviews, but it is in his interactions outside of the investigation where his mimetic depth truly shows. Early on in Chapter Two, Bigby, at his apartment, is waking Colin up, telling him he is sending him back to the Farm, as shown in the second panel in Figure 27: "You can't keep **sneaking** into the city to **crash** on my couch" (*LE*, 35 *et passim*). Colin disagrees, as he feels that Bigby owes him for destroying his house. Bigby counters with "Ancient history. | And all I did was scatter a few bales of **straw**" (third panel). This angers Colin, as Bigby omitted that he "tried to make **supper**" out of him (fourth panel). Bigby still does not feel that this justifies harboring Colin and threatens him with reporting him officially for the escapes if Colin does this again (fourth and fifth panels). He still offers him breakfast of "Ham'n'eggs", prompting Colin to state that Bigby is "still a **monster** through and through" (sixth panel).

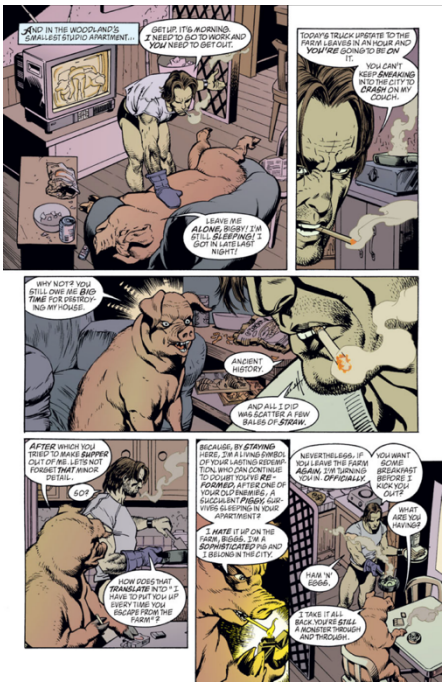

Figure 27: Bigby and Colin (*LE*, 35). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

In addition to confirming that Bigby is indeed the Big Bad Wolf (which was already briefly mentioned in his initial exchange with Jack at the beginning of the comic), this conversation also shows Bigby's own attitude toward his past. Bigby is very callous in his behavior to Colin, in that he is kicking him out, and going as far as offering ham to a pig. Yet

at the same time, it is apparent that Bigby feels very guilty about his big bad past. It is obvious that Colin crashing on his couch is a regular occurrence, yet despite being the sheriff, Bigby never turns him in. Him minimizing the situation – "all I did was scatter a few bales of **straw**" (*LE*, 35) – may be a way of coping with the past, or further callousness. Thus, similar to his reaction to the news about Rose Red (see 3.1), Bigby leaves readers enough space for their own interpretations of the character's mimetic aspect. This equivocacy of the character also extends the possibility of readers' character-centered illusion. The visual portrayal of the scene adds to this possibility as well. Bigby's home, "The Woodland's smallest studio apartment" (*LE*, 35), and his apparel, T-shirt, briefs, and an oven mitt, make for a very approachable character.

The breakfast scene reveals as much about Colin and the storyworld as it does about Bigby. Colin, a talking pig, is anthropomorphized. He sleeps on the couch (or rather, an armchair), sits at the table, and smokes. Internally, he shows development from the simple fairy tale animal as well. He still holds a grudge because Bigby destroyed his house and planned to eat him. Colin is also strongly driven by the desire to escape the Farm. Both of these characteristics are voiced when he tries to persuade Bigby to let him stay: "Because, by **staying** here, I'm a living symbol of your lasting redemption. Who can continue to doubt you've **reformed**, after one of your old enemies, a succulent **piggy**, survives sleeping in your apartment? | I **hate** it up on the Farm, Biggs. I'm a **sophisticated** pig and I belong in the city" (*LE*, 35). Colin is not a caricaturized version of the fairy tale version, as, for example, Beauty and Beast appear to be, but a complex character in his own right. This suggests a further depth to the world of *Fables*.

Bigby might at first appear to embody the lone wolf trope, with his bachelor pad and preference for investigating alone. Yet his connection to others is quite clear. In addition to caring (or feeling guilty) about Colin, Bigby is quite enamored with Snow, as is shown in his clumsy attempt at a date at the Remembrance Day celebration. The short story following the comic in *Legends in Exile* reveals this as well. This story, called "A Wolf in the Fold" and told in a very fairy tale style, sheds some light on how the Big Bad Wolf ended up as a sheriff in modern day New York. During the occupation of Homelands, the wolf helped refugees to cross to the Mundane World. Not because he felt so much for them, but because he was angry that the Adversary was killing all of his food, and the soldiers themselves did not taste good enough. One of the refugees he helped was Snow White. Years later, she found him in the forests of Transylvania, offering him a human form with the help of a knife "tainted with an ancient magic – an enchantment that lets men walk as wolves" (*LE*, 135). Soon after, as they sail toward

New Amsterdam, Bigby wonders "why, of all the people he'd encountered in his long life, he couldn't quite get her scent out his mind, no matter the passing of years" (135), revealing that for him, this was a love at first whiff. This story allows readers to reconcile the odd shift in the wolf's character, and Bigby's thematic aspect of symbolizing the history of Fables as a whole, while reinforcing consistency in Bigby's character.

The enchanted blade has de facto turned Bigby into a reverse werewolf with one key difference: Bigby can change his appearance at will. In fact, Bigby is the only character in *Legends in Exile* who has inherent supernatural powers (other than the lack of aging all Fables possess). This brings us back to the discussion on genre, and finally, the superhero aspect of *Legends in Exile*. Charles Hatfield succinctly summarizes Peter Coogan's three core elements which define a superhero:[8] "mission, powers, and identity. In the classical superhero story, the mission has to be a prosocial one, the powers above those of ordinary humans, and the identity a double one including a private civilian self distinct from the public heroic avatar" (3). We can find all of these aspects, at least to some degree, in Bigby Wolf. Figure 28 shows a scene from Rose Red's apartment building, shortly after Bigby points out that Rose might only date Jack to anger Snow. Snow is unhappy with Bigby's nosiness, and Bigby simply answers that "I can't **help** but notice things, Snow. I believe that's why you **hired** me as Fabletown's sheriff" (*LE*, 26). While this job might at first not be seen as a traditional superhero mission – Bigby is not dedicating his life to avenging the death of his parents, nor does he protect the world from alien invasions or genius supervillains – he is still working toward protecting his community and upkeeping the law and order. Although the word "hired" implies that Bigby might be reluctant in his vocation, he still willingly remains the town's only form of law enforcement – despite the implied measly pay (allowing him only the smallest apartment in the Woodlands). Bigby's superpowers are visible in his shadow, which retains his wolf form. It simultaneously shows the duality of his identity: although the wolf walks as a man, he is still a wolf. Thus, Bigby is the one character who brings forth the superhero schema in *Legends in Exile*. This image also illustrates how the visual and synthetic properties communicate the mimetic and thematic aspects of Bigby to readers.

Figure 28: Bigby's three aspects (*LE*, 26). © 2012 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

[8] See Coogan, Peter. *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*. MonkeyBrain Books, 2006.

As a result of Bigby's mimetic depth many readers develop a character-centered illusion. The way this is shown in the comic also allows readers to imagine a full storyworld, further engaging with the work. However, there is one scene in *Legends in Exile* where Bigby appears quite stereotyped: the parlor scene. I have mentioned previously that in terms of narration, the purpose of this scene is to involve readers in solving the clue-puzzle. It also serves in, finally, letting readers to know and admire the cunning of the detective. Hecox writes about Sherlock Holmes, "He is a known commodity whose keen powers of observation and attention to detail, determination to solve cases, and unmatced [*sic*] skill at deductive reasoning (though most logicians would call what he does inductive reasoning) define the man" (2159). Bigby is reminiscent of Sherlock in this scene and is styled as this kind of a detective throughout the comic visually with his constant smoking and trademark trench coat. Embodying the detective fiction schema can either break or strengthen the illusion depending on readers' interpretations of the character.

4.2 Bigby Wolf in *The Wolf Among Us* (Digital Comic)

The presence of the inner monologue of Bigby Wolf changes how readers engage with the character. Readers are now privy to his mimetic processes, and for the most part, they do not need to infer the motivations for his actions, such as how Bigby dancing with Snow would aid him in a criminal investigation. How does then Bigby Wolf in *The Wolf Among Us* (dc) engage with readers is an interesting question. Mikkonen notes that "The impact of generic expectations can be presumed to be strongest where the generic features are also the strongest, that is, in genre fictions such as humour strips, or superhero, war, romance, erotic, and horror comics that privilege particular kinds of stories, characters, and narrative modes" (193). In *The Wolf Among Us* (dc), Bigby Wolf carries on a lone-wolf trope of the hard-boiled comics. But it is once again in his interactions with other characters and their reactions where these features come out the strongest. It is also where readers engage with the character the most.

The Wolf Among Us (dc)'s Bigby Wolf is much more animalistic than his *Legends in Exile* counterpart. When Snow and Bigby find Faith's severed head, Bigby goes on to investigate the surroundings, and the following monologue ensues:

> There's more blood leading away from the scene. | To me, it's actually a **welcome** aroma. | For one thing, it implies a **trail.** | For another, it temporarily obscures the…**complicating** scent of **Snow White**. | So yeah, I **welcome** the smell of blood. | I

> may be useless when it comes to public relations, or politics, or anything that involves a **place setting**. | But I understand the **hunt** (*TWAU* (dc), 40).

Several conclusions can be drawn from this monologue. This monologue is shown at the same time as Bigby walks around the crime scene picking up clues (which he explains to Snow immediately after). The "trail" and the "hunt" are literal, in that he is currently on one, but also metaphorical, as these words evoke the semantic field of animal hunting. Bigby is portrayed as the predator, both as animal (as he can smell the blood) and as human (as he is visually portrayed). Bigby states just few pages earlier in the inner monologue, when he first smells Faith's blood, that it awakens his desire to hunt: "It's a different kind of hunting I do now, of course. | But the smell affects me just the same" (38). This solidifies the animal, and the fairy tale, aspect of the character. Bigby's human qualities are portrayed as well. The ellipsis and the word "complicated" show hesitation on Bigby's part. This lack of confession, however, is in itself quite revealing. Furthermore, considering the ambiguity of the narration agency, readers may wonder why Bigby is reluctant to admit his feelings to Snow, that is, is he hiding them from implied readers, or himself. Bigby's characteristics as a detective are shown here as well. By his own admission, his approach is quite predatory, and he sees his job as a hunt. Lastly, Bigby's attitude toward other areas in life is apparent as well and shows that he is quite uncomfortable in any social settings. Thus, this monologue lets readers to realize a mimetic image of Bigby on several levels at once.

Hard-boiled detectives are "highly individualistic and often lone operators" and unlike Sherlock Holmes type of a detective, who relies on their power of deduction, hard-boiled detectives' strength is "single-minded persistence and the toughness to withstand the stress and violence" they encounter during the investigation (Yarbrough, 2153). That Bigby is the violent kind of a detective is shown during the very first job presented to readers. Bigby is called to a domestic disturbance at an apartment building. He walks toward the apartment and is about to knock on the door, but as he hears the man inside threatening a woman, Bigby violently kicks in the door. A brief fight with The Woodsman ends with Bigby seemingly overpowering him. The Woodsman is on the floor with a broken jaw, and flips Bigby off. In response, depicted in Figure 29, Bigby steps on The Woodsman's fingers, breaking them, as indicated by the sound effect of "**CRAK**" (*TWAU* (dc,

Figure 29: Bigby breaking fingers (*TWAU* (dc), 14). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

14)). As he does that, he utters "Hush. Grown-ups are talking" (14). While this quip might be considered funny, the breaking of the fingers is quite an excessive and violent reaction. At this point, Bigby seems to be a thug himself.

Bigby's affinity for violence does not diminish. After adding an insult to The Woodsman's injury, Bigby goes on to question the woman. Soon, however, The Woodsman gets back up, hurling insults at Faith. Bigby tells her "Would you excuse me for a moment, miss?" (*TWAU* (dc), 15) before launching at The Woodsman, throwing him as well as himself through the closed window, and landing on Toad's car. Bigby's monologue aids in understanding how the situation escalated so much, as "most cops only have to deal with **human beings**. | The folks under **my** jurisdiction offer a **unique** law-enforcement challenge, to say the least" (17). While Bigby's thoughts help in understanding his proclivity for violence, Bigby's behavior directly contradicts himself.

The comic begins when Bigby arrives at Cambria Heights. He finds Toad in front of his tenement building, and immediately scolds him for not wearing a glamour while outside, as there is "**too much** at stake" (*TWAU* (dc), 7-8). This suggests to readers that drawing attention to Fables is not only against their rules, but it also puts the community in danger. Yet shortly after this it is Bigby himself who does this very thing, and much more ostensibly than a quiet toad could. This disconnect between Bigby's words and his actions deepens in the following scene. Bigby and The Woodsman's fight continues on the street until Faith swings The Woodsman's axe into the back of his head. The Woodsman falls to the ground, and Faith then proceeds to steal from him, and further jam the axe into his skull. Throughout, Bigby smokes his cigarette and converses with Faith, making no effort to stop her, or at the very least ensure that there are no curious onlookers. This sudden lack of concern for Fabletown's safety cannot be explained by the unique nature of his job. Rather, the character-centered illusion is weakened by the mimetic inconsistencies of the character. Caracciolo notes that "character-centered illusion is a specific kind of experience in which readers come to value a fictional representation of mind because of its interest, effectiveness, or plausibility" (8). Here, the plausibility is lacking.

Through Bigby's interactions with others we can notice a pattern which is not always apparent in his monologue. Bigby's attitude toward women is very different to how he interacts with men. Bigby insults and unnecessarily hurts The Woodsman, yet he makes sure to excuse himself to Faith before he continues the fight. He scolds Toad for not wearing glamour outside, and then he lets Faith rob a man lying on the street with an axe in his head. The Woodsman

survives this ordeal (he is a Fable, after all) and sneaks away as Bigby and Faith talk. When Bigby notices, he wants to go after him, but Faith stops him. Bigby angrily protests, "He **hit** you. He needs to **pay** for that" (*TWAU* (dc), 23). Bigby cares strongly for women, but, as the use and emphasis of the word "pay" indicates, he is more interested in revenge than justice. Once again, this is quite a strange quality for a detective. Some readers might reconcile this with Bigby's protective tendencies, but the significant difference between his treatment of men and women, in addition to the selective concern for the laws of Fabletown, might make it very hard to keep up with the character-centered illusion.

In fact, Bigby ends up in some kind of confrontation with almost every male character he encounters, including the Magic Mirror. In addition to perpetuating the sexist properties of the hard-boiled genre, Bigby's behavior reinforces the hard-boiled schema of a violent detective. Bigby is often downright cruel. After Toad is forced to admit that one of the Tweedles ransacked his place, he tells Bigby that he could not tell him as the Tweedle threatened to kill Toad's son. To this, Bigby points out, "And yet you talked anyway" (*TWAU* (dc), 97), as seen in Figure 30. Bigby is leaning above Toad in an intimidating posture, whereas Toad is portrayed only as a silhouette. The visually shown power imbalance underlines the cruelty of Bigby's comment. Toad only confesses after Bigby goes through his apartment with a symbolic magnifying glass, and Snow points out that Toad is bleeding, scaring his son. Bigby implies that Toad has effectively put his son in danger out of his own volition.

Figure 30: Bigby and Toad (*TWAU* (dc), 97). © 2015 Bill Willingham and DC Comics.

While Bigby is quite careless in his interactions with others (well, other men), he is oddly concerned about how others accept him. In a scene closely adapted from the original, where Bigby finds Colin sleeping in his apartment, Colin informs Bigby that everyone hates him. Bigby seems surprised by this, asking "Everyone **hates** me?" (*TWAU* (dc), 32). This is quite strange, as Bigby often chooses to be violent, and additionally, by his own admittance, is not very social. It should not be a surprise that he is not popular among Fables. Additionally, this shows a mental disconnect between his behavior and the consequences. These logical inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as the stereotyping of the characters, impede the retainment of a character-centered illusion.

4.3 Bigby Wolf as Player Character

Caracciolo notes that "once we are under a character-centered illusion we may want to connect it to broader interests and concerns in order to articulate a particular character's significance" (11). To get from character-centered illusion to this generalized reading of a text, Caracciolo suggests four interpretive strategies. These are as follows: reflexive reading, where readers interpretation stems from their own selves; categorizing reading, where characters are considered to be representative of a certain category of people, metacognitive reading, which builds on "universally human" mental processes, and finally existential reading, stemming from human existence in general (13-14). It is my belief that in video games where players can choose the protagonist's actions, such as in *The Wolf Among Us*, mimetic aspects of the protagonist are intertwined with those of the players' readings of those aspects – the presumed thoughts of the character are the actual thoughts of the player. Caracciolo's interpretative strategies help understand what I mean by this notion. In literature, these strategies are employed by readers as they interpret characters' mimetic aspects, thoughts and behaviors. I propose that these strategies are employed during gaming as well, with one key difference: readers often consider them *before* they decide on the protagonist's choices. The character-centered illusion then depends not only on the cohesion of the character, or, their mimetic cohesion, but on how the game reacts to the players' input.

These readings influence how players approach the character (assuming, of course, a certain level of role-playing from both the game and the players). Using reflexive reading, players will follow the choices which they believe represent their own beliefs. During categorical (and to some extent, existential) readings, these choices would revolve around a specific type, which in games most often means moral alignment, i.e., good or evil choices. Finally, metacognitive and reflexive readings combine in how players consider character backstory, be it one they have participated in during character creation, or that of a predefined character, such as Bigby Wolf. Settings also plays a role here. For example, players would choose to play differently a character who is an elven rebel and one who is a human citizen of an empire in a game set during a civil war.

Players' readings will shift throughout the game, depending on how the game aligns with their interpretations, for example in cutscenes, or as a direct response to the choices made. Additionally, often the game might not even provide an option which would correspond with the player's vision of the character. At the beginning of *The Wolf Among Us* (vg), Bigby encounters Toad inside the tenement building. Toad goes on a brief rant as soon as he notices

Bigby's presence: "Listen, mate I know I don't look human. It's a problem, I get it, I just stepped out the apartment for just a second to see what kind of damage this drunk shit is doing. Just cut me a break, yeah? I'll get me glamour first thing in the morning" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith). At this point in the game, players unfamiliar with *Fables* might be perplexed at seeing a toad there, but Toad's speech gives them enough information on which they can base their following choice on (see 2.3). Players can choose how they react from four options, shown in Figure 31: "I'm looking at a 3 foot toad", "Enough excuses, Toad", "No harm done, Toad" or "[…]", denoting staying silent (Episode Faith). These roughly correspond with neutral, bad (strict) or good (lenient) attitude, as well as the silent type, and the categorical reading is fairly intuitive. If players do not choose any before the time runs out (indicated by the red line below at the bottom of the image, which shortens as time progresses), the dialogue defaults to silent option. Most of the dialogue choices in the game have four options and follow similar alignment division, some clearer than others.

Figure 31: Dialogue options (*TWAU* (vg), Episode: Faith). © Bill Willingham and DC Comics™ Bill Willingham (2013).

Once upstairs in the hallway in front of The Woodsman's apartment, players can hear The Woodsman and Faith audibly arguing behind the apartment door. The object highlight displayed around the doorknob gives players two options: to kick the door in, or to knock. Here, players who would see Bigby as more law-abiding, or less confrontational, might choose the knocking option over bursting in. No matter the entrance, players end up fighting The Woodsman. After he is subdued, Bigby and Faith converse briefly, before The Woodsman starts threatening them again. The game opens another dialogue with the following options: "HEY!", "[Throw him out]", "Will you excuse me a moment" or "[…]" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith). The result is always Bigby and The Woodsman falling out of the window, after a short cutscene of the two running toward each other. The only difference in the outcome is what Bigby says (and the third dialogue option skips the running cutscene).

The problem here is not the inconsistency of Bigby's actions. Toad is encountered inside the building, not on the street. Furthermore, players can choose how they react to Toad – they might not have chastised him for not wearing glamour. The issue is that throwing The Woodsman out of the window is not a choice at all. If one were to see Bigby as less

confrontational type, that is, following the "good" alignment, the choices might be to let Toad's infraction go, and knock on the door. Once The Woodsman is up again, one might wish to, for example, try to deescalate the situation in some way (for example by arresting him, as he does later in the game). By not allowing a peaceful option, this categorical reading of Bigby is interrupted. Thus, any preconceived mimetic interpretation or character-centered illusion of the character, is broken fairly early into the game.

Even if Bigby's actions, and thus his mimetic properties, correspond to those of the players', the character-centered illusion does not hold if the game does not acknowledge these actions. During dialogues, certain choices are marked with a notification displayed at the upper right corner of the screen, saying "[They] will remember that" (*TWAU* (vg)). For players, this notification might signal a change in attitude from the character. For example, if they choose to be nice to Toad about him being out of glamour, this might result in a reasonable expectation of Toad being more forthcoming in the future. Yet when Bigby arrives the next day with Snow to follow up on the phone call, Toad is just as evasive no matter how the interaction at the beginning turned out. Here, players can take several routes. The inquisitive detectives will interact with the clues. At each clue, Toad makes an excuse, and players then decide how they react (for an example see 3.3). If players notice that Toad is lying and choose the corresponding dialogue option, they receive a notification that "You caught Toad in a lie" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith *et passim*). Otherwise, the game indicates that "Toad talked his way out of that one". If players catch Toad in at least one lie, once they talk to Toad again, the game displays two options: "You lied, Toad" or "[Threaten him]". If they accuse Toad, Bigby summarizes all of the clues he found and what he deducted (based on players' choices). Toad, however, does not confess as they are interrupted by Snow and Toad Jr., Toad's son. Snow notices that Toad is bleeding from his head, and this is finally what gets Toad to confess. It is not Bigby's (or players') detective skills which get results, but Snow – which may ruin the moment for the players.

Players can also intimidate Toad into confessing (either by threatening him, or downright beating him). This option is available immediately, and players can play out the bad-cop version of Bigby instead of investigating. The result is always the same: Toad only starts talking once Snow steps in and points out his injury.The disconnect between players' actions and non-player characters' reactions is most visible with the aggressive choices. As Toad starts finally talking about Tweedle Dum attacking him, players can ask him what Toad told Dum. Angrily, Toad replies "If you're worried about your own skin, forget it. I didn't tell him nothin'

about you or your shit" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith). Immediately as he utters this, his expression and tone of voice completely change, and in a soft and friendly tone, he says "I would've told you- - I wanted to, really I did…" and continues to explain that the Tweedle threatened his son (Episode Faith). Note that in the game, Bigby never comments on Toad's confession. Toad's extreme change in attitude is disturbing possible immersion in the game. If Bigby is supposed to be the bad cop here, it makes no sense that Toad is suddenly friendly and apologetic. Interaction with non-player characters then is crucial in keeping (or breaking) character-centered illusion.

The inconsistencies in the game's affordances toward players' readings of the character all stem from the intradiegetic narrative properties of the game, and the need to push the story forward. On the extradiegetic level, the game acknowledges the players and provides clues about the storyworld. The in-game notifications address the players directly: "*You* caught Toad in a lie" (*TWAU* (vg), Episode Faith; emphasis added). These messages, especially the ones denoting non-playable characters' attitude and reactions to Bigby's conduct, aid in players' engagement with the game in that they help formulate certain expectations, and at times acknowledge and reinforce players' readings of Bigby Wolf. In this way, the mimetic properties of the protagonist are a direct result of players' own interpretation readings. For example, as discussed above, a notification informing players that a non-playable character will remember their actions can result in players expecting an appropriate attitude from said characters later in the game. The game, however, often fails to meet these expectations, and this contradiction dissolves the character-centered illusion. In the video game, the choices of the players based on their categorical readings and preconceived notions of the character serve in typifying the character of Bigby Wolf. The game often fails in catering to these readings, leading to the breaking of immersion. In the webcomic adaptation of the game, the disconnect is reflected in the logical inconsistencies of the character, and thus breaking character-centered illusion and the engagement of readers.

4.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have used the concepts of mimetic properties of a character, and the resulting character-centered illusion, in illustrating how the various works engage with readers. In *Legends in Exile*, the synthetic properties of Bigby Wolf allow readers to infer his mental processes. His interactions with other characters often reveal as much about them as they do about himself, and in this way Bigby's characterization is employed in creating the storyworld.

Bigby Wolf in *Legends in Exile* is a Sherlock Holmes type of detective with superhero characteristics, a stark contrast to the hard-boiled detective of *The Wolf Among Us* (dc). The inner monologue in the digital comic changes how readers interact with the character, as readers now need to reconcile Bigby's behavior with the presented mimetic processes of the character. The categorical reading of Bigby in the game can be observed in his stereotypical portrayal in the comic, and the resulting inconsistencies in his behavior contribute to the breaking of the character-centered illusion.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored how the affordances of the media affect how genre, narration, and characterization come across in a narrative. I have also demonstrated the influence of an interactive agency on reader engagement. The discussion on genre outlined the specific genre properties of each work, and how these different genres include readers in the story. *Legends in Exile* is a typical clue-puzzle with its closed setting in the community of Fables, red herrings and a parlor scene. This story is also a fairy tale, and the two genres complement each other. Clue-puzzles should not revel in violence, and this is highlighted by the fairy tale ending, where no one is harmed. The close-knit community of Fables, where everyone knows everyone, and where readers are themselves familiar, at least to some extent, with the characters, results in a unique kind of an investigation. The visual properties, often reminiscent of fairy tales, underline the detective story unfolding.

Although set in the same storyworld, some twenty years earlier, and with the same major characters, the hard-boiled detective comic *The Wolf Among Us* is very different to the vibrant *Legends in Exile*. The digital comic is a dark, literally and metaphorically, bloody tale of corruption and murder. The characters, instead of retaining their unique fairy tale characteristics as they do in *Legends in Exile*, are now stereotyped as damsels in distress and corrupted villains. The alienation between characters and the excessive violence are both typical generic features and affordances of the medium in the game version of the story. Allowing players to discover characters on their own as well as including combat sequences extends the level of interaction. Thus, the medium affordances of the game strengthen the generic properties and are reflected in its comic adaptation.

How the stories are narrated determines the engagement with readers. Using Kai Mikkonen's approach of examining relationships between what and how it is shown and what is perceived, I have shown how this engagement works in the three narratives. *Legends in Exile*

has a textually marked implied fairy tale narrator, who, nonetheless, does not affect the perceived objectivity of the texts. Similarly, the flashbacks and embedded narrations show clear distinctions between what is shown and told objectively, and what are characters' personal, subjectified recollections. The investigation in *Legends in Exile* is narrated in an objective way which does not mislead readers but allows active participation by leaving space for interpreting various clues. Bigby Wolf's role here is simply to show the clues and to interrogate suspects, not to present theories which might result in readers' bias. Additionally, readers are acknowledged as neutral observers and further involved in the story by using devices such as sound representation or spatially foregrounded characters. Thus, the clue-puzzle's primary purpose, intellectual engagement, is fulfilled.

The digital comic *The Wolf Among Us* has a less pronounced implied narrator. The narration of Bigby Wolf, a feature of the hard-boiled genre, is prominent. This inner monologue heavily subjectifies the events shown. This showing is also ambiguous, as at times Bigby seems to be taking on the role of the graphic narrator. Additionally, the multimodal features such as layout aid in the bias of the story presented. Readers' participation in the investigation process is further hindered by the immediate explanation of the clues. Ironically, this diminishment in reader engagement is an influence of the video game. The game's primary goal is to tell a story. Limited controls, automatic-only save system, forced camera view, and the frequent, non-skippable cutscenes, all serve in aiding of the progression of the story, but hinder how much players can interact with the game. Furthermore, the game ensures that players get to the end whether or not they solve, or even interact with, the clues. The narration of *The Wolf Among Us* comic demonstrates this emphasis on the plot advancement at the cost of reader engagement.

The character of Bigby Wolf is very different across the works. Marco Caracciolo's concept of character-centered illusion, building on the mimetic properties of a character, is useful in illustrating how the different versions of Bigby Wolf engage with readers. In *Legends in Exile* readers often need to infer Bigby's mimetic properties from his behavior. His interaction with other characters aids in revealing the storyworld to readers. Bigby is a complex character who, as a detective with great deductive powers, combined with the style of the narration does not influence readers in arriving at the solution of the puzzle. In *The Wolf Among Us* comic, Bigby is a much more individualist, animalistic and violent character, and readers might often be brought out of the character-centered illusion when his actions do not match his

words or thoughts, and the cohesion of him as a real-person shatters as a result. This, once again, can be attributed to the influence of the video game.

The four interpretative strategies Marco Caracciolo proposes as a way of bridging the gap between character-centered illusion and generalized reading of a story are useful in understanding the shortcomings of the characterization in the video game, and, to some extent, its comic adaptation. I have adapted these strategies by considering how players may use them not only when interpreting the character's actions once they have taken place, but in defining the characters and choosing these actions themselves. To retain the character-centered illusion, and with it, immersion, it is not enough that players interact with the game, but the game must appropriately interact with the players. The video game *The Wolf Among Us* often fails in this aspect, and forces actions which might be in direct contradiction with players' readings of the character.

The analyses of these three concepts show how genre, narration, and characterization, and the interplay of these along with the unique media affordances give emergence to these transmedia narratives. The visual style of the original work *Legends in Exile*, that is, an illustration, along with the genre-tied nature of the characters as unageing, immortal beings, allows for an adaptation that can visually stay true to the source. The audience does not need to adjust to, for example, a different actor playing a younger version of the character. The similar narrative structure brings the stories even closer together. Majority of the audience is familiar with at least some of the fairy tale characters of *Fables* and *The Wolf Among Us* (both comic and video game), as well as New York – be it the real-world city, or one (or many) of its fictional representations. While the knowledge of the various detective fiction genres might not be as universal, the stereotyping of the genre tropes in the works nonetheless trigger generic schemas. And it is the detective fiction which differentiates the two stories: despite all the similarities, the contrast between clue-puzzle and hard-boiled detective fictions, and the differences in how they are portrayed, result in very different experiences when reading (or playing) these texts.

As in other transmedia adaptations today, in addition to extending the storyworld, the video game *The Wolf Among Us* offers a platform on which the audience can participate in the story. As I have shown, there are limits to how players can actually be involved. One reason for this is the genre of the game itself, a storytelling adventure. Another reason, which I was not able to discuss in this thesis, is the chronological setting. Games that use the same protagonist across adaptations can give players agency if they are sequels, such as CD Projekt

Red's *The Witcher* Series, set years after the events of Andrzej Sapkowski's pentalogy concluded (although much of the narrative remains the same, with only minor changes to the setting and characters). Prequels are bound in ensuring that the characters and the storyworld end in a state compatible with the original story, and as a result, the audience familiar with the franchise will not be, for example, shocked at finding Snow White's severed head – they know that she cannot die, and that this is a misdirection. In the video game, the participation in shaping the storyworld of *Fables* or the player character Bigby Wolf is bound by the canon. Still, despite the game now allowing players to have a significant impact on the story or the character, the various dialogue and other choices may inspire in the audience a fanonical version of Bigby Wolf, thus affording a different kind of participation.

This study is only an initial exploration on this subject. Due to the constraints of this thesis, I was unable to cover a variety of topics. I have only analyzed one fifth of the video game, and even less of the digital comic adaptation, as it includes additional material providing further backstories of Bigby Wolf, Faith, and other characters. Comparing the entire game with the comic adaptation, specifically with choices taken in accordance with the portrayal in the comic, could provide an additional point of comparison. Even with the small sample many of the features were omitted. Music and sound play a large role: the ambient music underlines the dark visuals of the hard-boiled genre. They also function as a narrative device, for example the changes in tone and tempo signal approaching combat, or footstep sounds signal an off-screen character. An analysis of these features in future studies could further illustrate how the game facilitates immersion.

While in this thesis I focus specifically on visual media adaptations, I believe that the approach I have demonstrated here is viable in other media as well. Similarly to Chiao-I Tseng, who applies his character motivation discourse methods both on film and comic, and novel and film adaptations (238), the methods shown in this thesis can be useful in studying other transmedia adaptations, such as novels adapted to games (as the aforementioned *The Witcher*) or vice versa, as well as in examining larger-scale role-playing games and their inclusion of players via characters.

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